

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA  
FACULDADE DE BELAS-ARTES



## **SUBSTITUTE LOCATION**

**Semiotics and Perception of Substitute Location**

**In Fiction Film - *A Road Movie***

Thomas Behrens

Orientadora: Prof<sup>ª</sup>. Doutora Maria João Pestana Noronha Gamito

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de

Doutor em Belas-Artes, Especialidade de Audiovisuais

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## RESUMO

Resultando de um Projecto de Pesquisa Artística, a minha tese é composta por uma parte teórica, com o título “Semiótica e percepção do Exterior Substituto (Substitute Location) no cinema de ficção”, e por um trabalho prático, um *Road Movie*. O *Road Movie* irá conduzir-nos através de um sistema de tópicos coordenados (alienação, assimilação, interpelação ideológica, imediatidade, etc.) que o trabalho teórico aborda sob um ângulo diferente.

Analisei uma série de filmes de ficção e obras de arte, focando-me na questão de como é que os lugares e locais são percecionados pelo sistema visual humano, que opera como um interface ou mesmo como um centro de tradução entre ver, percecionar, mapear e ser. A percepção visual é ao mesmo tempo a fonte que ancora a informação semiótica compreendida como representativa de um local real e fixo, e o ponto de projeção para mapear o mundo em esquemas de realidade virtual. Qualquer cineasta ou fotógrafo tem de encontrar a sua própria posição numa escala que vai desde a ‘projeção subjetiva total’ até à ‘documentação objetiva total’. Assim, a semiótica do espaço narrativo fílmico/fotográfico não é apenas uma categoria geográfica, geométrica, ou cinematográfica, mas é sempre também uma categoria moral. Isto é expresso no duplo sentido do termo ponto de vista, que designa simultaneamente uma dimensão topológica e uma dimensão ética.

Como objeto da minha investigação teórica escolhi uma prática comum em produções cinematográficas: o fenómeno chamado ‘Substitute Location’ (Exterior Substituto) servirá como ponto de partida para a minha viagem especulativa. O filme do James Bond *Die another Day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002), é um dos muitos filmes mainstream que ilustram esta prática. O enredo do filme passa-se em parte em Havana, em Cuba, e algumas das cenas mostram o ator Pierce Brosnan no papel do agente 007 passeando-se no famoso Malecón habanero, mas na realidade estas cenas foram filmadas em Cádiz, Espanha. Assim, Cádiz serve como uma ‘Substitute Location’ para Havana. Uma localização ou exterior é o local onde é filmado (parcial ou inteiramente) um filme ou série de TV, para além das cenas que são filmadas em estúdio ou cenários extras produzidos para o filme. Desde Roberto Rossellini e o Neorrealismo italiano, muitos realizadores preferem filmar nos locais onde supostamente se desenrola a ação por entenderem aproximar-se mais da realidade filmando num sítio real ao invés de num estúdio artificial fingindo ser um sítio real. Os realistas — e entre eles muitos documentaristas — assumem, na tradição filosófica de Aristóteles, que as estruturas básicas da realidade são confiáveis, podem em princípio ser refletidas pela

experiência, e podem ser adequadamente representadas através de formas linguísticas ou simbólicas (iconográficas).

O fenómeno particular da ‘Substitute Location’ aborda de uma forma concreta o como a desincorporação e a semiótica ideológica do «faz de conta» trabalham lado a lado. Substitute Location permite-nos presumir simultaneamente que alguém na equipa cinematográfica (o produtor / realizador / repéreur) acreditou que o local A “parece mais historicamente apropriado que” ou ‘será percecionado como’ o local B enquanto explora momentos de convergência e de conflito entre o significante e o significado. Uma Substitute Location torna-se um potencial, ainda que involuntário, meio para uma dialética do ver, onde os ‘pontos cegos’ das nossas projeções se tornam parte integral da nossa percepção individual e coletiva das identidades e da sua interpelação ideológica.

A minha abordagem artística à realidade é influenciada pela disciplina da Psicogeografia. Não existe uma definição consensual para Psicogeografia mas é inegável que esta disciplina foi profundamente influenciada, se não mesmo criada, por Guy Debord (1931 – 1994) e pela Internacional Situacionista (IS). O corpo de trabalho criado pela IS pode parecer trivial mas eu sou da opinião que os mecanismos e estratégias da IS são ferramentas úteis para compreender e combater as atuais circunstâncias da nossa sociedade, que fez do consumo passivo e do seu pré-requisito — o sucesso financeiro de cada um — a medida de todas as coisas. A psicogeografia tenta potenciar formas relevantes de olhar para ambientes passados, presentes e futuros; ambientes que hoje são em grande parte construídos pelos meios de comunicação de massa e os designados social-media. De alguma forma, a Psicogeografia tenta recuperar uma forma de viagem que foi outrora sinónimo de aventura. Hoje, só é possível constatar um declínio da viagem autêntica, que deixou de ser heroica ou individualizante. Os psicogeógrafos nutrem um desencanto pela rapidez com que os viajantes modernos se podem deslocar pelo planeta, sem riscos e sem a possibilidade de se confrontarem com o desconhecido. Antes da queda das barreiras globais na semiosfera, a viagem não equivalia a uma mudança quase instantânea de lugar, mas sim a um acontecimento transformador, carregado de importância histórica e psicológica.

Uma vez que a questão da identidade está intimamente relacionada com os lugares e os seus significados, a minha investigação foca-se nas modificações que o decorrente processo de mediatização acarreta e, em particular, o papel do ecrã neste processo. Assumo que a presença ubíqua de ecrãs traz uma sensação coletiva de dissociação, já que a identidade é cada vez mais construída fora de um corpo que a ancora. Com isto em mente,



proponho ampliar o conceito de Substitute Location e aplicá-lo a todas as nossas projeções. A abordagem interfacial para o mundo da vida gera um universo além, como nas *Arcadas* de Walter Benjamin, um espaço-sonho ersatz e frustrado (substitute location), que serve predominantemente para agitar desejos e impulsos consumistas. Uma vez que os nossos desejos são projetados para este espaço de mediático de sonho, os nossos corpos são deixados para trás. Ocasionalmente, aparece uma brecha, e podemos olhar para o mundo fora do sonho, que parece um gigantesco aterro para resíduos e detritos. Defino a minha tarefa como investigador no campo da Psicogeografia como um esforço para encontrar e construir imagens dialéticas a partir daquele repositório histórico. No entanto, estou igualmente interessado em descobrir como é que a medida de uma vida humana pode resistir a esta sensação coletiva de dissociação. Assim, o meu trabalho prático, o *Road Movie* tomou a forma de uma biografia. As biografias olham para o passado, que é tópico. Se as pessoas não tivessem laços a um lugar, não haveria identificação, não haveria cultura. A minha pesquisa analisa as modificações e transformações dos lugares quando estes são transpostos para um espaço mediado, quando passam de ‘sítios’ a ‘vistas’, à medida que são incorporados na narrativa fílmica. A memória de um lugar ou corpo físicos e reais, e o seu uso como significantes desencarnados ajuda a criar a forma de uma grande narrativa, que constitui uma paisagem estruturada de pensamento. A narrativa cinematográfica é solipsista. A subjetividade torna-se distanciada e é aplicada à sociedade como um todo, que reúne milhares de narrativas. Não só coisas e memórias mas também signos são localizados. Concentrando-se numa descrição espacial, a narrativa pode ser organizada em relação à História, bem como à sua interpelação ideológica com a identidade individual.

À primeira vista, existe apenas uma rua e o seu nome: Rua Ricardo Chibanga. A toponímia é uma parte importante da Geografia histórica e portanto da Psicogeografia: os topónimos são relativamente estáveis através dos tempos, documentando a história de uma povoação. Os movimentos migratórios dos indivíduos refletem-se na origem dos nomes, os antropónimos, que são particularmente instrutivos. Nomes de áreas residenciais como Lourenço Marques (uma cidade), o monte Everest (uma montanha) ou a Rodésia (um país) são topónimos que, *stricto sensu*, referem a exploradores e colonizadores. Isto significa que estes locais são ideologicamente interpelados pelos seus próprios nomes. O que me surpreendeu quando me deparei com esta placa representando o nome da rua, foram os significantes ausentes: a placa informa-nos que Ricardo Chibanga é um toureiro, mas não indica que ele é de origem africana. No entanto, o seu nome torna este facto conspícuo pela sua ausência e não deixa de influenciar o sentido de um significante que é

utilizado. Outra forma de ausência carrega em si a etiqueta daquilo que «é evidente», ou seja, e neste caso, que a lide do touro é uma atividade geralmente reservada a uma classe aristocrática Ibérica predominantemente branca. Subitamente, a divisibilidade deste local emerge do seu próprio nome, da linguagem que o inscreve, tal como um ‘point de capture’ fixa um significante flutuante. Como esta linguagem tem de comunicar algo (algo mais do que ela própria), a placa não nomeia exatamente o local. Refere-se a uma pessoa, um toureiro africano, que veio viver para Portugal. Quando ele chegou, Portugal era uma potência colonial. A ideologia oficial em Portugal declarava que todos os territórios africanos eram parte integral do território Português e que não existiam colónias — os nativos desses territórios eram efetivamente cidadãos de Portugal. A estrada que encontrei transforma-se agora num local onde, da cisão entre a visão topográfica da África colonial e o nome real da Rua Ricardo Chibanga, emerge uma tensão que assombra este espaço urbano com um sentido adicional que é necessário abordar: o nome de uma pessoa viva tornou-se o nome de uma estrada. Este ato de assimilação é na verdade o encerramento de um debate com a história. O *Road Movie*, que no meu caso é um filme sobre uma estrada, tenta reabrir este ‘caso fechado’.

Palavras-Chave:

Chibanga, Ecrã, Exterior Substituto, Psicogeografia, Road Movie

## ABSTRACT

My thesis, the result of an Artistic Research Project, is composed of a theoretical part, which is titled “Semiotics and Perception of Substitute Location in Fiction Film” and a practical work, a *Road Movie*. The *Road Movie* will take us through a coordinate system of topics (alienation, assimilation, ideological interpellation, immediacy, etc.) that the theoretical work approaches from a different angle:

For the theoretical part, I have analyzed a number of fiction films and artworks with a special focus on the question how places and locations are perceived by the human visual system, which operates as an interface or even as a translation centre between seeing, perceiving, mapping and being. Visual perception is at the same time the source that anchors semiotic information perceived as representative for a real, physical location and the projection point for mapping the world in schemes of virtual environments. Any filmmaker or photographer has to find his own position on a scale that goes from 'total subjective projection' to 'total objective documentation'. Hence, the semiotics of a filmic/photographic narrative space is not only a geographical, geometrical, or a cinematographic category, but always also a moral category. This is expressed in the double meaning of the term point of view, which designates simultaneously a topological and an ethical dimension.

As the object of my theoretical research I have chosen a practice that is common in feature film production. It should serve as a point of departure for my speculative journey, and this phenomenon is called 'Substitute Location'. The James Bond movie *Die another Day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002) is one of many mainstream movies, which illustrate this practice. The film has a plot that takes place in part in Havana, Cuba and some of the scenes show the actor Pierce Brosnan as agent 007 walking along the famous Malecón in Havana, but these scenes were actually shot in Cádiz, Spain, so Cádiz serves as a ‘Substitute Location’ for Havana.

A location is a place where a film or a TV series is wholly or partially produced, in addition to the scenes that are shot in a film studio or on extra sets produced for the film. Since Roberto Rossellini and Italian neo-realism, many filmmakers prefer to shoot in real locations because they believe that they will catch more realism if they are in a real place, and not in an artificial studio set pretending to be a real place. The realists - among them many documentary filmmakers - assume, in the philosophical tradition of Aristotle, that the basic structures of reality are reliable, can be reflected by experience, and, in principle, can

be represented adequately in linguistic or other symbolic (iconographic) form.

The particular phenomenon of 'Substitute Location' addresses in a concrete way, how disembodiment and the ideological semiotics of 'make-believe' work hand in hand. Substitute Location allow us simultaneously to assume that somebody in the film team (the responsible producer/ director/ location scout) believed that location A 'looks more historically appropriate than' or 'will be perceived as' location B while exploring moments of convergence and conflict between the signifier and the signified. A Substitute Location then becomes a potential, yet involuntary, environment for a dialectics of seeing, where the blind spots of our projections become an integral part of our individual and collective perception of identities and their ideological interpellation.

My artistic approach to reality is influenced by the discipline of Psychogeography. There is no universal definition of what Psychogeography means, however, this discipline was undoubtedly influenced, if not created by Guy Debord and the Situationist International (SI). The body of work which has been created by the SI may seem trivial today but I think that the current state of our society, which has raised passive consumption and its prerequisite, individual financial success, to the measure of all things, can not only be grasped, but it also can be effectively countered with the methods and strategies of the SI. Psychogeography endeavors to develop relevant insights into past, contemporary and future environments, and today, these environments are constructed to a significant degree by mass and social media. In some respect, Psychogeography seeks to reclaim a form of travel that was once synonymous with adventure. Today, one can only state a demise of real travel that is no longer individualizing or heroic. Psychogeographers are disenchanted at the sense of inertia, with which modern travelers seem to move around the globe, taking no risks and facing no unknowns. Prior to the breakdown of global barriers in the semiosphere, travel was not an almost instant change of places, but a transforming event filled with historical and psychological significance.

Since the question of identity is closely related to places and their meaning, my research focused on the changes that the ongoing process of mediatization brings about and in particular, the role of the screen device in that process. I assume that the ubiquitous presence of screens brings forth a collective sense of dissociation, as identity is increasingly constructed outside of an anchoring body. With this in mind, I propose to broaden the concept of Substitute Location and apply it to all our projections. The interfacial approach to the lifeworld generates a universe beyond, that is, like Walter Benjamin's *Arcades*, an abortive ersatz dream-space (substitute location), which serves predominantly to stir desires

for consumerist impulses. Once our desires are projected into this dream media space, our bodies are left behind. Occasionally, an opening appears, and we can look back onto the world outside of the dream, which looks like a gigantic landfill for waste and debris. I define my task as a researcher in the field of Psychogeography as to find and construct dialectical images from that historical depository.

However, I am equally interested in finding out, how the measure of a human lifetime can resist that collective sense of dissociation. Therefore, my practical work, the *Road Movie* took on the form of a biography. Biographies look back on a past, which is topical. If people had no ties to a place, there would be no identity, no culture. My research analyzes the modifications and transformations of places into mediated space, from 'site' to 'sight', as it is constituted in the film narrative. The memory of a real, physical body or place, and their uses as disembodied signifiers helps creating the shape of a grand narrative, which constitutes a structured landscape of thinking. The film narrative is solipsistic. Subjectivity becomes distanced and is applied to society as a whole, which collects thousands of narratives. Not only things and memories but also signs are located. By focusing on a spatial description, the narrative can be organized in relation towards History as well as towards its ideological interpellation with individual identity.

At a first glance, there is only a road and its name: Rua Ricardo Chibanga. Toponymy is an important part of historical geography and henceforth of Psychogeography: toponyms are often very stable in time, and they document the history of a settlement. Migratory movements of individuals are reflected in the origin of names, the anthroponyms, which are particularly instructive. Residential site names like Lourenço Marques (city), Mount Everest (mountain) or Rhodesia (country) represent the reference of general toponyms to the names of explorers and colonizers in the strict sense, which means, those places are ideologically interpellated by their very names. What struck me when I came across this road sign are the absent signifiers: the sign says that Ricardo Chibanga is a bullfighter, but it does not say that he is of African origin. However, his name makes this fact conspicuous by its absence and nevertheless influences the meaning of a signifier actually used. Another form of absence has the specific label of 'that which goes without saying', in this case, the fact that usually bullfighting is an activity reserved for a predominantly white, Iberian aristocratic class.

Suddenly, the divisibility of this place emerges from the name, from the language that came to inscribe this place, just as a 'point de capture' keeps a floating signifier in place. As such a language must communicate something (something other than itself) the

road sign does not exactly name the just the place, but it creates a whole system of values. The street name refers to a person, an African bullfighter, who came to live in Portugal. Portugal had been a colonial power at the time when he came. The official ideology in Portugal stated that all territories in Africa were actually an integral part of Portugal and there was no such thing as a colony - the natives of these territories were actually citizens of Portugal. The road that I encountered now turns into a place where a tension emerges with the split between the topographic vision of colonial Africa and the proper name Rua Ricardo Chibanga haunts this urban space with an additional meaning that needed to be addressed: the name of a living person has become the name of a road. This act of assimilation is actually a historical 'closure'. The *Road Movie*, which is in my case a film about a road, aims at reopening this 'closed case'.

Key Words:

Chibanga, Psychogeography, Road Movie, Screen, Substitute Location

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**“Images contaminate us like viruses.”**

Paul Virilio (b. 1932)  
Cultural theorist and Urbanist

**ersatz**

[er-zahts, -sahts, er-zahts, -sahts]

1. adjective

serving as a substitute; synthetic; artificial:  
an ersatz coffee made from grain.

2. noun

an artificial substance or article used to replace something natural or genuine; a substitute.

Word Origin: 1870-75; < German *Ersatz* a substitute (derivative of *ersetzen* to replace)

(definition of ersatz at dictionary.com)



## Introduction

My doctoral thesis on the subject *Substitute Location* has, as a result of an artistic research project, a theoretical part (Semiotics and perception of Substitute Location in fiction film) and a practical part (a *Road Movie*). The central question of my thesis asks if the screen device is the contemporary expression of what Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) called *phantasmagoria*. In his essays, “Benjamin associates the phantasmagoria with commodity culture's experience of its material and intellectual products, echoing Marx's use of the term in *Capital*.” (Cohen, 1989: 88)

In his 1939 essay *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin developed an original synthesis of Henri Bergson's (1859–1941) philosophy of memory with Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) theory of trauma. Freud had argued in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that traumatic experiences broke through the protective shield of individual consciousness and then returned as intrusive memories and disabling symptoms. Freud's theory became for Benjamin an explanation of how cultural forms could also be approached as carrying the equivalent of unconscious memory traces and trauma. In his final theses *On the Concept of History*, Benjamin proposed that the critical practice of seizing upon these disturbing images had the potential to shatter the dominant interpretation of the past. (Meek, 2007)

Today, the screen is not only the ‘protective shield’ that protects us from traumatic experiences, but also a central device for the functioning of global capitalism in the form of consumerism. Therefore, screens have to be everywhere. However, the fact that they are everywhere renders them also a banality, and as such, invisible. The inspiration for my artistic research comes from the French intellectual Georges Bataille (1897-1962), specifically from a text about art and cruelty:

As children, we have all suspected it: perhaps we are all, moving strangely beneath the sky, victims of a trap, a joke whose secret we will one day know. This reaction is certainly infantile and we turn away from it, living in a world imposed on us as though it were "perfectly natural", quite different from the one that used to exasperate us. As children, we did not know if we were going to laugh or cry but as adults, we "possess" this world, we make endless use of it; it is made of intelligible and utilizable objects. It is made of earth, stone, wood, plants, and animals. We work the earth, we build houses, and we eat bread and wine. We have forgotten, out of habit, our childish apprehensions. In a word, we have ceased to mistrust ourselves. Only a few of us, amid the great fabrications of society, hang on to our really childish reactions, still wonder naively what we are doing on the earth and what sort of joke is being played on us. We want to decipher skies and paintings, go behind these starry backgrounds or these painted canvases and, like kids trying to find a gap in a fence, try to look through the cracks in the world. (Bataille, 1993)

This section closes with an image that matches with the final shot of the movie *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998). At the end, the protagonist Truman Burbank faces an open door in the painted backdrop of a completely artificial world, which he held, until then, for the true and only existing world. Nobody had told him that he was the only real, non-acting person in this show. In my artistic research, such a perception of our immediate surrounding serves, as in the case of Truman, to prove that any environment is not only not immediate, but, moreover, conveys a sort of simulacra, a concept which was described by Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) as a “third order simulacra, or simulation simulacra: based on information, the model, cybernetic play. Their aim is maximum operationality, Hyperreality, total control.” (Baudrillard, 1991)

Bataille believed that the ritual of sacrifice was mankind's culture's attempt to escape from the captivity of the simulacrum. Not only Bataille was fascinated by the tradition of bullfighting (*Story of the eye*, 1928), but also were many painters, like Goya, Picasso, Dalí, but also Francis Bacon or Eric Fischl. I have chosen the subject of bullfighting for my practical work for two reasons: first, because in bullfighting, there are no screens. It is the opposite of a simulation. Secondly, because I learned that this seemingly anachronistic spectacle triggers distinct reactions in different spectators. A novel by Oedon von Horváth titled *Der ewige Spiesser* from 1929, describes a bullfight in Barcelona, which leaves each of the three protagonists, travelers from Austria, with a distinct impression: disgust, grandiosity or sexual excitement. I was intrigued by the fact that one and the same phenomenon can lead to reactions that stand in quite extreme opposition to each other. For one spectator, something is deemed obscene while for the other, the very same thing is cheerful and uplifting. Could it be possible that one can hold these sensations all at once, combined?

Another observation left me intrigued: In a Portuguese or Spanish restaurant, the waiter would occasionally show me the raw dead animal, be it a fish or a hare, and ask for my approval: the waiter wanted to know if I preferred this particular fish grilled or baked on my plate - or the other one. Whenever I was having dinner with friends from countries like Germany or the U.S., I could feel the discomfort that this ritual of pre-approval would cause them. Obviously, there were worlds colliding in this very moment, and more than once, my friends would lose their appetite completely.

While some of the local customers would only order a meal that had been on display for approval, my friends could only enjoy their dinner if they were *not* obliged to see the dead animal beforehand. Again, why is it that one and the same phenomenon results in distinct reactions? These questions are at the core of my investigation.

Bullfighting is a tradition (some stubbornly claim that Bullfighting is a form of art, or even the mother of all arts), which is no longer politically correct, for reasons that shall be investigated. My research will have come full circle with my practical work on a bullfighter, on a concrete biography, analyzed from multiple angles. In bullfighting, there resonates in a peculiar way the Freudian 'death drive' and it foreshadows that "every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress." (Virilio, 1999: 89). Literary works such as James Graham Ballard's (1930–2009) *Crash* take up the issue of sacrifice and address it beyond any mythology: the dimension of transcendence, that is inherent in all these phenomena, may apply for the spectator, but not for those involved, like Truman Burbank or the bullfighter or the victims of a car crash.

The child, it goes without saying, speaks of this to no one. He would feel ridiculous in a world where every object reinforces the image of his own limits, where he recognizes how small and "separate" he is. But he thirsts precisely for no longer being "separate," and it is only no longer being "separate" that would give him the sense of resolution without which he founders. The narrow prison of being "separate," of existence separated like an object, gives him the feeling of absurdity, exile, of being subject to a ridiculous conspiracy. The child would not be surprised to wake up as God, who for a time would put himself to the test, so that the imposture of his small position would be suddenly revealed. Henceforth the child, if only for a weak moment, remains with his forehead pressed to the window, waiting for his moment of illumination. It is to this wait that the bait of sacrifice responds. What we have been waiting for all our life is this disordering of the order that suffocates us. Some object should be destroyed in this disordering (destroyed as an object and, if possible, as something "separate"). We gravitate to the negation of that limit of death, which fascinates like light. For the disordering of the object, the destruction is only worthwhile insofar as it disorders us, insofar as it disorders the subject at the same time. We cannot directly lift the obstacle that "separates" us. But we can, if we lift the obstacle that separates the object (the victim of the sacrifice), participate in this denial of all separation. (Bataille, 1993)

This section resonates with Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), who sees "simulacra as the avenue by which an accepted ideal or a privileged position could be challenged and overturned" (Deleuze, 1968: 69).

As object of my theoretical study, I have chosen a practice that is common in the area of feature film production. It should serve as a point of departure for my speculative journey, and this phenomenon is called Substitute Location. The theoretical work will expand the before mentioned concept, which consists in looking at an object from different angles, different points of view.

The James Bond movie *Die another Day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002) is one of many mainstream movies, which illustrate this practice. The film has a plot that takes place in part in Havana, Cuba (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Havana, Cuba

Some of the scenes show actor Pierce Brosnan as Agent 007 walking along the famous Malecón in Havana, but these scenes were actually shot in Cádiz, Spain. (Fig. 2)



Figure 2: Cádiz, Spain

A location is a place where a film or a TV series is wholly or partially produced, in addition to the scenes that are shot in a film studio or on extra sets produced for the film. Since Roberto Rossellini and Italian neo-realism, many filmmakers prefer to shoot in real locations because they believe that they will catch more realism if they are in a real place, and not in an artificial studio set pretending to be a real place. The realists - among them many documentary filmmakers - assume, in the philosophical tradition of Aristotle, that the basic structures of reality are reliable, can be reflected by experience, in principle, and can be represented adequately in linguistic or other symbolic (iconographic) form. Until today, however, many fiction film producers shy away from the uncertainties of shooting on location: unstable weather, security issues, curious onlookers and many other aspects may threaten control of the production and thus of the film budget. Many movies shoot inside a studio and do additional recordings on location. It is often incorrectly assumed that the filming took place at the location where a scene is set within the action - but that's not always the case, as shown in the example of the James Bond movie.

The first ontological question therefore concerns the relationship between a real place and a location. It will be shown that the relationship could compare with the one between nakedness and nudity - take David Lynch's (b. 1946) film *Blue Velvet* (1986), where the actress Isabella Rossellini is more than once shown as nude, and then, as she shows up on the street, confused and on the verge of a breakdown, she is no longer nude

– she is naked. The first thing one wants to do when seeing a naked and not a nude person, is to offer her some clothes to wear.

Again, although the object may seem one and the same from a factual standpoint, there exists a significant difference, and this difference is in our gaze, our perspective onto an object (be it a place or a person or a dead animal). Here, we are already employing the method of a parallax view, because we are able to consider the promenade in Cádiz as the Cádiz beach promenade or as the Malecón in Havana - it depends on which eye we close first to see how our object jumps before a fixed background.

For now, we content ourselves by stating that a location is an abstract concept, while a place is a concrete concept. Filmmakers and media professionals do not always distinguish clearly between these concepts, but as a rule of thumb we can say that scriptwriters, directors and producers who work in the area of fiction film, basically understand the location of a movie as an abstract concept. They do so in the philosophical tradition of the antirealists, or constructivists. Their approach is that the basic structures of reality are only projections of our thinking about the world. Whatever reality's nature is, regardless of our knowledge of it, is either not accessible for us, or, as more radical representatives of this position have it, is a pointless question, because reality is simply what we construct ourselves. In a strictly epistemological framework, these theories stand in insurmountable confrontation with each other; however, the ontological, descriptive content can match with the two concepts: one has to take into account that the anti-realistic, constructivist position just considers that we have created the structures in the perception process whereas the realist claims that these structures exist in the world – regardless if there is an observer or not.

Fiction film producers are motivated by the desire to control the production process and the look of the film as tightly as possible; among other things they do so because of the associated production costs. It is therefore no surprise that, with the advent of digital, computer generated image (CGI) sets, more and more movies resort to digital or semi-digital settings.

Documentary filmmakers, on the contrary let the camera run for many hours, only to see if something unexpected happens. They hope for some contingency outside

of their perception that would surprise them. They look for something they have not designed or even thought of. This practice must seem downright absurd for the producers of fiction films, for the above-mentioned reasons: it is waste of time and money. Another question of my research deals with the effects that the tendency to use digital sets has on our concept of reality. I think it goes without saying that the producers of the James Bond movie had no interest to trigger a sort of alienation effect inspired by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) in the cinema audience. Most probably it was necessary to find an alternative for the location of Havana, especially since it was not allowed for the production to shoot in Cuba. The plot had to be set in Havana, but for the production department, Havana was impossible, hence someone had the idea to use Cádiz as a replacement for Havana. (Fig. 3)



Figure 3: Film still from *Die another day* (Lee Tamahori, 2002)

For those in the audience who know Havana well, the sudden presence of lampposts on the Malecón and the absence of some typical socialist architecture could seem strange, and, scratching their heads, they could claim ‘That is not Havana!’ just as the child in Hans-Christian Andersen's (1805-1875) tale *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1837) bursts out: ‘But the Emperor is naked!’ The, in this case unintentional, alienation effect could trigger a generalized sensation of disbelief; it could further completely spoil the enjoyment of two hours of entertainment. Usually, what happens is, of course, exactly the opposite in the mind of the viewer: the uneasy feeling of disbelief and cognitive dissonance is quickly pushed aside with the argument that this is a film, a



work of fiction, and the producers of fiction films are held accountable to make clear immediately at the beginning of each movie with a standard disclaimer: “This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.” (TVtropes, n.d.) Why should we expect truth or some analogy with reality, if the whole film is just a work of fiction? Had the film been made entirely with digital, CGI images, including those of Havana, no spectator would even think to complain about eventual inconsistencies.

However, the question would be much more complicated, had the film claimed to be a documentary, a non-fiction film, or a news report. We should be allowed for a moment to consider our reaction as spectators, if we realized, watching the news in the evening that some shots of Cádiz, Spain would be presented to us with the written label ‘Havana’. (Fig. 4)



Figure 4: Cádiz with the label ‘Havana’

My guess is that we would first ask whether this was a mistake. If we learned that this was done deliberately, to have us believe that the material had actually been gathered in Havana, that would qualify, in fact, as a scandal. Let us further imagine our reaction if the editor tried to justify the use of footage from Cádiz with the argument that he had no permission to shoot in Havana. That would be ridiculous and scandalous at the same time. The editor would then even go on to explain that the entire reasoning of the news report was not in any way affected or hampered by the replacement footage and that the message of the report is no less relevant due to the use of images from Cádiz. He wasn't able to get hold of some current pictures of Havana, where is the



problem? Well, we would argue that there is no moral or ethical justification to do this. News must be presented with facts and may not lie to us or mislead us in such blatant ways. We would ask back how we are to believe the entire reasoning of the report since our trust in the whole institution had been lost already due to this gross negligence.

This example shows us two different categories of perception. The media perpetuates the conflicts of ancient theorist who took very different epistemological positions, championing the reality principle or constructivist positions with regard to problems, which seem one and the same from an ontological position. Depending on whether we focus on the mimetic faculty of the film or its diegetic dimension, we also look for different truths. It follows that from the very outset, our perception is guided and regulated by ethical standards.

Throughout my dissertation, I will analyze examples of artistic works, especially, but not exclusively from fiction films, in order to operate a dialectical exploration, in which the well-established concept of Substitute Location will be transformed into a broader concept, which I label 'substitute location'. This new concept aims at consciously creating a sensation of cognitive dissonance, yet not longer unintentionally and involuntarily, as abovementioned in the James Bond movie. These operations of dialectical processes may then serve as a driving force for further explorations in the fields of perception and semiotics. The chosen method for the creation of my work follows the logic of this duplicity; it is a parallax view, or a dialectics of seeing. This alternating point of view contrasts the site as a concept of a lifeworld with the place as a description of a position within a structure. Places survive today often only in images that bear witness to their existence, and the images have to carry all the memory. The spatial concept, and with it the concept of identity, are increasingly caught in transformation, since places in earlier periods represented duration - and now this duration is lost. Because we know many places only as pictures, they have won a presence of another kind. The relation of image and location is shifting. Today, we do not visit certain places, but the images of these places, just as we visit locations in an image. The electronic images have become places without substance. They are without a body, which could serve as an anchor. Once the locations are lost in the real world, they retreat into images, giving them an alternative status as a place. In the specific case of my investigation, they become *substitute locations*.

The overall methodology set out for the project is founded in artistic research, which is, in my case, a hybrid research approach, with some qualitative elements, but predominantly reflexive, since my practical work never pretends to seek evidence, but rather, should serve to illuminate and exemplify my theoretical findings, and vice versa.

My theoretical analysis as well as my fieldwork is systematically guided by the principles of Psychogeography. There is no universal definition of what Psychogeography means, however, this discipline was undoubtedly influenced, if not created by Guy Debord (1931–1994) and the *Situationist International* (SI). The body of work which has been created by the SI may seem trivial today, but I think that the current state of our society, which has raised passive consumption and its prerequisite, individual financial success, to the measure of all things, can not only be grasped but also be effectively countered with the methods and strategies of the SI. Psychogeography endeavors to develop relevant insights into past, contemporary and future environments, and today, these environments are constructed to a significant degree by mass and social media. In some respect, Psychogeography seeks to reclaim a form of travel that was once synonymous with adventure. Today, one can only state a demise of real travel that is no longer heroic or individualizing. Psychogeographers are disenchanted at the ease with which modern travelers move around the globe, taking no risks and facing no unknowns. Prior to the breakdown of global barriers in the semiosphere, travel was not an almost instant change of places, but a transforming event filled with historical and psychological significance.

The *Situationist International* was undertaking a rebellion in principle against the pervasive uniformity and boredom of urban space. It stood for a revolution of daily life, caused by art, protest and aimless walking. Drifting (*dérive*) became one of its central tactics and it grew finally into Psychogeography, an interdisciplinary practice, still waiting to gain full recognition in academic circles. Psychogeography demands from its practitioners to depart from routines, particularly from unquestioned mental tracks, to take different approaches off the beaten paths or to wander in new ways on the all-too-well known ones, to understand that it takes new experiences and free creation to define our lives. Today, Psychogeography could be useful as an active resistance strategy against the ongoing mediatization and commercialization of all areas of life.

The common feature of all Psychogeographers is, however, the habit of walking as creative practice, since travel as drifting has a three-part structure: *departure - passage - arrival*. And so does its equivalent in creation: *project - process - product*. When I start to walk, I must, from the outset, choose between two options: do I want to go to a specific destination on a predetermined route, perhaps even within a certain timeframe - or will I wander randomly, without knowing where I arrive and how long the walk will be? It is obvious that most people generally choose the former option, while the Psychogeographer prefers the latter. Most people will argue that it is the constraints of everyday life that determine this kind of movements. One should act efficiently, effectively and purposefully - this is a maxim of the capitalist ethics, which is rarely questioned. The word 'should' already indicates that this maxim is rooted in religion, where rules have been established and a catalogue of right or wrong behaviors such as the *Ten Commandments* had been issued. The moral and ethical buildings are defined by appeal and command.

Today, there is also the *Constitution* and the *Civil Code*, in addition to the *Ten Commandments* but the most powerful individual structure is the super-ego, which keeps our drives and emotional impulses (id) under control. The super-ego stands for the human ability to put brakes on actions that are emotionally triggered, or to make them, at least, more socially acceptable. Consciousness learns first from the closest caregivers (parents, teachers, etc.), which emotions are admitted and to what extent and how to, if necessary, suppress, or sublimate them. Later in life the super-ego provides us with alternatives to the programs that are already designed in the part of the brain that triggers emotions and which responds to external stimuli. As a result, it makes us more flexible and at the same time adaptable to complex situations. Depending on the context, the super-ego can also completely inhibit and paralyze, or install erratic, even pathological behavior. Human progress, according to Humanism, should rely mainly on the ability to control emotions, to be able to stop or modulate them. Aristotle (384 – 322 BC) described humans as the 'rational animal' but Sigmund Freud was skeptical. The irrational forces of the id put the weak ego under too much pressure. This also explains the suffering of many people, who feel helpless towards and overwhelmed by their emotions (they become addicted, behave aggressively, have eating disorders, suffer from anxiety disorders, etc.) and cannot understand that these problems are the price

that we have to pay to be able to live in a civilized society. It is extremely difficult to control emotions with the mind. This is because there are more nerve connections for passing information from the centers of emotion to the center of the conscious mind than vice versa. The part of the brain that is responsible for emotions has thus far more influence than the reasoning part. However, pure rationality, applied in excess, proves sometimes even more inhumane and cruel as the much maligned, suppressed and denied, deemed bestial, barbaric and demonic id. In this context one has to ask the question if the problems that are caused by a too much of emotion are not precisely a result of a so-called civilization, which, in its quest for seamless technological efficiency, is no longer able or willing to deal with feelings. Marquis de Sade (1740 – 1814) had prophetically foreseen this time. Any passion crime was for him rather an expression of humanity whereas the death penalty, which he opposed vehemently, was a sign of the cold, inhuman side of the law which functions like the indifferent machine in Franz Kafka's (1883 – 1924) *In der Strafkolonie* (1914).

Sigmund Freud called this dilemma the Uneasiness, or Discontent in Civilization and his investigations were running parallel to the industrial revolutions and the World Wars. Jacques Lacan, who added a topological dimension to the psychology of Sigmund Freud, described what we call the ego as a very narrow domain, which is under permanent siege, and the ego can easily lose ground against the super-ego or the id, as everyone who has ever been in a stressful situation, will readily admit.

My idea of a collective super-ego is that of a tourist city map; it tells us exactly where we should turn our gaze, which routes are recommended and what areas we should better avoid. These city maps usually leave no room for our own imagination.

Until now, we have always had large reserves of the imaginary, because the coefficient of reality is proportional to the imaginary, which provides the former with its specific gravity. This is also true of geographical and space exploration: when there is no more virgin ground left to the imagination, when the map covers all the territory, something like the reality principle disappears. (Baudrillard, 1991)

In most modern cities, there exists nonetheless an area where aimless strolling is strongly encouraged: it is the pedestrian zone with its many shop windows. Here, in the arcades, we are supposed to let loose, to dream away and be seduced to purchase questionable items. If we expand this geographical approach a bit further, we could

conclude that media is also part of the collective super-ego; media tells us what we should want, what we should dream of and what we have to be afraid of. Unlike anything else, media is pre-formatting our perspective on the world - it is not so much the content itself that counts, since it is constantly changing, but the gaze, which is formatted and takes on a standard which is then applied to every phenomenon - in the same fashion as an industrial DIN norm is applied to a variety of products.

The task of a Psychogeographer is to position himself as a stranger who comes from the outside, to break with firm or encrusted structures. It will be shown that any procedure of finding meaning is never complete if it stops short by analyzing a given phenomenon. A dialectics of seeing must leave the sphere of ontology in the sense of taxonomy since ontology works only descriptively and cannot explain the why behind a certain question. This is where special metaphysics goes deeper, in our case the attempt of an explicit conceptualization of media phenomena, arising from (in)congruencies between psychological and geographical spheres.

As in a criminal investigation, it is not sufficient to discover the perpetrators of a crime; is it perhaps even more important to ask why the crime was committed and what can be done in general to prevent such crimes. (If, such as in Nazi Germany, the crime was helping a Jew to survive, then the corresponding procedure to find meaning at the time, would have been to show that Nazi laws are inhumane and should be abolished. It is easy to indicate this today when everyone else has already adopted this point of view, but at the time, it would have been paramount to do just that).

The procedures to find meaning are only effective or even possible in specific situations. The situation as such may typically not seem obvious, since we tend to repress the fundamental inconsistency of being, mostly because we tend to conform to a widely accepted ideology, as the story of *The Emperor's new Clothes* shows. Certain social conventions may protect us and our fellow human beings from the cruelty of the naked truth, and denial can go long distances, as in the saying of the 'elephant in the room', which everyone notices, but nobody mentions.

The following is a list of objectives set out for the project:

- Understand the theories of realism versus constructivism in relation to an urban context and to media space.
- Understand and commit to psychogeographic theory and practice in order to develop a dialectics of seeing and a parallax view.
- Apply psychogeographic theory and practice to media space in order to analyze films and artworks and develop the concept of substitute location further, reading the term 'substitute' in the Freudian sense of *ersatz* as in *ersatzhandlung* or *ersatzbefriedigung*
- Understand the passive and interactive role of screen devices in contemporary consumerist culture.
- Exemplify the feedback loops that media space generates in the formation of identity and its ideological interpellation
- Apply psychogeographic theory and practice to urban space in order to develop new and original approaches to the creation of films and photographs.
- Make a film that departs from a psychogeographic concept, as a détournement from the Road Movie genre

My own dialectical position seeks the confrontation of the realist and the constructivist perspectives and locates meaning right in the gap between these two discourses. In Jacques Derrida's (1930-2004) words, my task is to seek for “iterability as a differential structure (that) escapes the dialectical opposition of presence and absence, and instead implies both identity and difference.” (Anderson, 2012: 84)

The first part of this thesis will analyze a conventional, realist, non-mediatized concept of place, the influence of place on identity and a structuralist reading of place as location. In the second part, I will suppose that with mediatization, a pure realist concept of place has become impossible. Media space has supplanted all common ground in the lifeworld and it is now ubiquitous. The third part then seeks to answer the question if media space is inhabitable, and what would the ‘outside’ of this space look like? This question inverts the dichotomy gaze/body and assumes that we live in the world of the ideologically tinged gaze and look back at an arbitrary/indifferent world of

bodies. The fourth part finally is a reflection on my own film, which is in itself an attempt to construct a dialectical image.

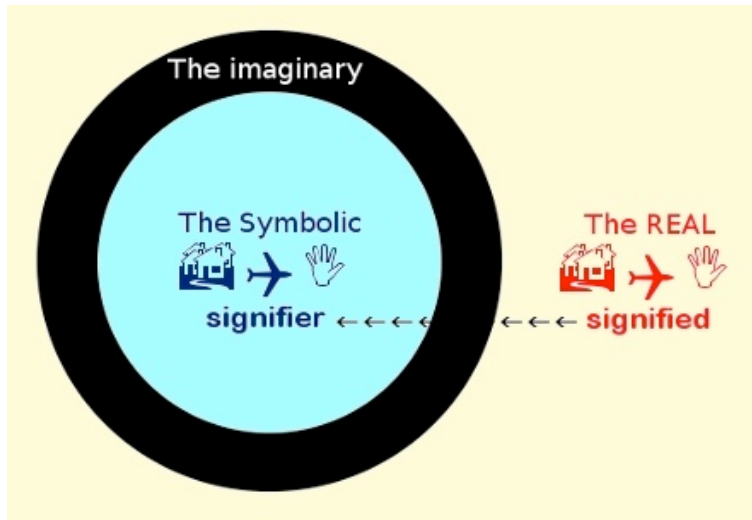


Figure 5: The signifier as a symbol of an absence

As shown in Fig. 5, the Real has to pass through the membrane of the Imaginary, to become part of the Symbolic. The Real itself opposes and resists any representation; it is something that remains always on the outside - even if it is the Real of our own body, the Real of our own sensations. In other words, the place we usually call Cádiz, is only Cádiz if we apply the filter-membrane of non-fiction. As soon as we enter the territory of the fiction narrative (in this case a James Bond story), we are allowed to name the place formerly known as Cádiz 'Havana', since we applied as a filter-membrane the diegetic sphere of the film universe. Any given phenomenon must therefore always be embedded in its specific diegetic universe (discourse/ narrative), and this classification immediately requires a moral or ethical stand. This circumstance is inscribed in the term 'point of view', to express that a topographic dimension is, at the same time, a visual perspective and an opinion, a judgment obviously shaped by specific ethical or moral values and considerations.

The image or the sequence of images in a fiction film that depict a Substitute Location could thus be equated with the 'floating signifier' in the context of social interactions, since a "floating signifier may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean. Such a floating signifier necessarily results to allow symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it." (Mehlman, 1972: 10-37)

One of the basic assumptions of human perception is that humans can have only one point of view. This is a very static concept of perception and the demand for a - culturally speaking - static identity is, in my opinion, a reverberation of feudalism. My research aims to uncover a number of practices that could be used as a dialectical method for detecting meaning. My example of the erratic news report refers to the question of where to look for truth or meaning. To document the facts properly, is obviously not sufficient, because facts are only perceived as facts, if they fit comfortably in a predefined system, which Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) referred to as the symbolic order - the law.

The laws that apply to fiction films are, as the example shows, totally different from the rules for non-fiction films. Dialectical processes could be set in motion at some point of negation, much in the spirit of the deity of Dionysus. "Dionysus is represented by religions as the protector of those who do not belong to conventional society and thus symbolizes everything which is chaotic, dangerous and unexpected, everything which escapes human reason and which can only be attributed to the unforeseeable action of the gods." (Daniélou, 1992: 15)

The above-mentioned example of incorrect or deliberately misleading reporting points to another problem: it is what Aristotle described as the relationship between substance and accident. He came to the equation, that 'the accident reveals the substance' (Virilio, 2007: 10), which is to say, in our case, that once we see shots of Cádiz labeled 'Havana', this should qualify as an error or accident in an otherwise well-functioning reporting system. As news watchers, we perhaps even appreciate these accidents because they ensure the substance of a media industry that usually meets the highest moral and ethical standards. In fact, any political communication and each consumer marketing relies on these false contrasts, which typically go like this: "Since we know that North Korea's media landscape is completely propagandistic, it follows that our own media landscape is not." or "It is understood that these parties are not democratic, as a result, our own political party must be democratic", etc.

These false opposites prevent us at times from asking more profound questions, like: where are my own blind spots, when I decide to look at an object from only one



point of view? Which are the perils of this new ethical ambiguity that ‘the obscene object of postmodernity’ (Žižek, 1992: 141) has brought to our gaze?

With my film, I want to demonstrate that every gaze is determined by an ideological interpellation, and my ambition in making the film is to show that any change of perspective is triggered either by a change in the object itself, or by a change in the ideological (political, cultural) framework.

## PART I: THE SITE AND ITS SYMBOLIC EFFICIENCY

### Chapter One: Place as Location

#### 1.1. *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946)



Figure 6: Film still from *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946)

In the film *Germany Year Zero* (Fig. 6), arguably a fiction film, director Roberto Rossellini (1906-1977) implants a fictive cast and story into a very real surrounding, that is, Berlin, right after the war, still in ruins. In 1946, an ordinary German family is struggling to survive in a city wrecked by relentless bombing right after the end of World War II. The father of the family is severely ill, incapable to work and to provide for his family; his older son is a former soldier who is hiding from the police, because he is afraid of the consequences of fighting in the war. His daughter Eva is goes out to clubs every night with her boyfriend Wolf. It is not clear what she has to do to bring home valuable cigarettes and small gifts to contribute to the survival of her family. The twelve year-old Edmund wanders aimlessly through the destroyed city trying to find work or some food to alleviate the misery of his family.

The film does not focus on the war criminals and the evil masterminds of the III Reich, but on ordinary citizens who had to live through the war, some of them serving in the army, others staying at home while the bombs dropped all around them. Especially the young ones had been indoctrinated with a crude and cruel Nazi ideology based on racism and superiority. In one of the film's most explicitly political moments, Edmund plays a record that he has found in the rubble. It contains one of Hitler's speeches, and the words reverberate through the building, which is a ruin. Then Rossellini cuts away to show more bombed-out buildings, rows of houses missing their roofs, debris and destruction everywhere. Hitler's ideologically charged speech about victory and glory seems empty and hollow, when played to underscore these images, which prove what Hitler's plans ultimately did to his people and his cities. This is a defining moment in the film's task of rendering knowledge absurd and futile. Hitler's ideological propaganda is put in stark contrast to the truth, in this case not so much the story in itself but the very location, that tells a horrific tale of destruction on a gigantic scale. That is what this film, like Rossellini's other documentary-style films that were made in the immediate aftermath of the war, is really about: to show the human toll of believing in and acting out an ideology, in this case, a naive boy, who cannot be held responsible when he acts out an acquired knowledge that his teachers had conveyed to him. Edmund is increasingly desperate and this drives him to the brink of crime and corruption, yet he is trying to do anything he can to help his struggling family. He's just a child and he barely understands much of what's going on, but he hears the remarks from neighbors who call his sister a whore and he hears his father moaning in agony about wanting to die, to relieve the family from the burden of caring for a sick and old man. These circumstances drive Edmund, who finds himself in a desolate situation, to a fatal conclusion: in one shot, Rossellini depicts Edmund and his father in a composition as the boy offers his father a poisoned cup of tea and then watches him drink it – in fact this scene shows how he murders his own father.

Only in hindsight, he realizes that he has killed his father out of a crude idea and Edmund commits suicide because this truth is too much to bear. The cost paid by ordinary people who are simply trying to survive and provide for their families is very high when they are seduced into or forced to live by an ideology that a ruling class has established for society.

*Germany year zero* holds a lesson for film directors with its depiction of harsh, cruel realities, confirming that the director has captured the essence of everyday life for so many impoverished people just barely holding on in the aftermath of Europe's defining war: had this kind of film been shot in a studio and not 'on location', the whole impact would be severely put into question. However, shooting on location was only made possible by some technological inventions that had not existed before. Light, portable camera equipment and film stock that did not require massive extra lightning made neo- realism possible. Often the camera operators were the same ones who filmed the front lines during wartime. In a very practical sense, Rossellini has managed to establish a cinematographic culture of filming on location and ever since, all cinematic new waves, from *Neo-Realism* to *Cinema Verité* to *Nouvelle Vague* to *Dogma* draw on this technique of contrasting propaganda with the real state of things. Jean Luc Godard (b.1930), Werner Herzog (b.1942) and a few other directors would then go on to explore the possibilities of subverting the traditional concepts of fiction and non-fiction films. However, it is useful to remind us that this dialectical structure has by now become a standard in the news and advertising industry's repertoire and can be used as a propaganda tool altogether. Noam Chomsky (b.1928) remarks:

For those who stubbornly seek freedom around the world, there can be no more urgent task than to come to understand the mechanisms and practices of indoctrination. These are easy to perceive in totalitarian societies, much less so in the propaganda system to which we are subjected and in which all too often we serve as unwilling or unwitting instruments. (Chomsky, 1984)

Naturally, propaganda filmmakers and neo-realists have to use the same filmmaking techniques. But calling them any one of the terms above limits how we tend to think about them. It was Bertold Brecht, who tried to counter these techniques, essentially by revealing them. "Brecht, the German playwright and director, had nothing but disdain for the conventional, commercial bourgeois theater of his time. He considered it a branch of the narcotics business". (Mitchell / Boyd, 2012: 210) Most mainstream movies now function in the same way theater of Brecht's time did: it sought to manipulate the audience emotionally and to bring about a suspension of disbelief, along with an emotional identification with the hero or the protagonist. Audience members were encouraged to go on an uncritical ride on an emotional roller coaster, crying when the heroes cried, laughing when they laughed, identifying with them, even

when the main characters had nothing in common with themselves or their interests. Many of the techniques that were invented by Brecht, have been absorbed and incorporated into contemporary theater and mainstream movies, but his challenge remains relevant: how can the problem of emotional manipulation be confronted while creating a radically critical, popularly appealing and accessible social art practice, which is also stimulating, surprising and entertaining. At the core of Brecht's concerns was the distinction we have to make is between distanced and immersed spectatorship, or rather, between a passive, transcendental and an active, embodied spectatorship. In the case of distancing, the subject is to be positioned at the vanishing point of a god-eye's monocular perspective. The ideological structure of representation and perspective empowers the subject to constitute and rule objects ideally. The transcendental spectator identifies with the technological instrument, be it a camera or a projector, thereby with himself not as a human body, but as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness). He becomes the very condition of possibility of the perceived and hence is a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every gravity law.

The subject's identification with the object thus takes on his internalization of it, his symbolic command of the world launched only by and after his perception. Notable is the perceptual and ontological distance that the spectator-subject in the theater takes from the screen. It is the necessary distance for unfolding the historically westernized visual field along the *Cartesian geometric coordinates system* (René Descartes, 1596-1650), and this distance is crucial for scientific and critical thinking. It is through this subjectively transcendental distance that the subject can objectify the world: the subjective objectification from the point of the eye, or point of view (POV). The mirror stage is the cradle of this subjectivity.

In this respect, the cinema is already on the side of the Symbolic (which is only to be expected): the spectator knows that objects exist, that he himself exists as a subject, that he becomes an object for others: he knows himself and he knows his like: it is no longer necessary that this similarity be literally *depicted* for him on the screen, as it was in the mirror of his childhood. (Metz, 1982: 46)

That is, all imaginary signifiers on screen are refracted duplicates of the original imaginary signifier in the mirror, the reflecting duplicate of the reflected subject. The original signifier, which submerges in the Imaginary, is, conversely, the starting point of

all imaginary signifiers organizing the Symbolic. The identification shift from camera to character opens the subject's closed circuit to an inter-objective network, as the first-choice character is not only a subject but also an object for others in the diegetic network of relationships. Moreover, going back and forth between different characters, the possibilities for identification ultimately reconstitute the whole diegesis as a unified object, the object that corresponds to, while integrated into, the transcendental Subject. In short, the screen is a big refractive mirror with its subset mirrors (imaginary signifiers).

## 1.2. The place in the lifeworld and its double

All people, including, strictly speaking, the sedentary, move themselves and their immediate possessions through a territory, seasonally and periodically; every moment in any environment involves movement. When it comes to the sedentary people, the radius of their movements is only slightly smaller, and the places visited are less, but perhaps with a higher frequency of visits. People of all ages move and they do it for various reasons, be it to do work, be it because of an emergency, be it for a pastime. In some cases the designed space that allows the movement gains a specific shape and becomes a recognizable location. The site is classified, gets an identity, a name. Thus one environment creates another, one place transforms into another place, the space doubles: now the space exists in the real world but also in the imaginary space that is attached to it. It is the totality of these imaginary spaces that make up the semiosphere. People believe to know the city district, which is considered expensive and chic, just like they believe to know the legendary mountain world nearby, whilst the fewest of them have actually been there. There are many places that have existed in the past, and now these places of the past have only survived as pictures. Man has always made a picture of places and he remembers the place as a picture, but formerly, that meant that he had actually visited them or had lived in a different time in them. The process of generating meaning runs as a system of common value determination: this system includes a structure of signs, language, monuments, stories, and this structure is defended as a social reaction of people or either questioned by them, depending on whether they are forced to live in these places, or whether they do it voluntarily. The

duplicity of spatial perception already refers to the consistent theme of this thesis and it is condensed in the two images that I have chosen as the starting point for my analysis of mediated spaces on the one hand and for my practical work on the other.

If a person is asked to name the important places in his or her life, they will no doubt mention the place of residence, the place of birth and the place of work. Home is a kind of triad of these places, but the concept of home has other connotations that go beyond the local term. Home describes the relationship of a human being with regard to a particular spatial and social unit. The term contrasts with social alienation and has generally positive connotations. It is often associated interchangeably with terms such as place of residence or nationality. People are tied to their homes by birth and childhood, as well as by language, earliest experiences or acquired affinity.

Home is a triad of descent, community and tradition. The origin affects a person's identity to a significant degree and serves as an instrument for self-assurance and guidance in an increasingly alienated world. The own identity is based on a sense of belonging, and this in turn can only emerge as distinct from other identities, which are then commonly referred to as foreign. Home was and is a response to the beginning of the modern age, the loss of individuality and the disappearance of a sedentary, mostly rural, traditional community. In international law, there is the right to a homeland. It is a concept that is recognized worldwide as a fundamental human right and is a prerequisite for the exercise of the right to self-determination. Home began as an integral aspect of a central European identity, initially patriotic without being nationalistic. Regional identity is until today, together with the local dialect, an important basis for the sense of home for any person. However, the fascist 'blood and soil' literature of the German Nazi movement incorporated and abused the specific aspects of patriotism and attachment to a homeland, because it is relatively simple to attach the positive feelings for one's own home to a negative attitude towards all strangers.

With the Nazis, the sense of home has been instrumentalised. They claimed that the body of a German nationality is deeply rooted in the soil of their homeland and their ancestors' practice of agriculture goes back hundreds and thousands of years. The Nazi ideology stated that the Third Reich should be considered at the deepest level as the sacred home of the German people's unified community that has, in fact, historically

never existed. Those who were killed in Nazi concentration camps, were, in the eyes of the Nazis those who have been officially designated as enemies of the people's community and thus referred to as a foreign threat to the integrity and security of their home.

### 1.3. Change of location: from nomads to tourists

Once people were nomads. Today, they move between home, work, shopping and leisure centers. During holidays, many return as tourists in a simulation of nomadic life. Whilst they may visit other coordinates in the system of latitude and longitude, it does not necessarily mean that they do leave their mental environment. Home and work determine the center of life as a logical consequence of the invention of agriculture and animal breeding. The nomadic experience is fundamentally different from the sedentary experience at each unit of the scale. Nomads do not wander aimlessly, but usually follow seasonal trajectories, sometimes supplemented or interrupted by inspired digressions. Nomads are, by definition, always active on the go, even if they may settle down for a longer time in one place. The paths of their migration follow a synthesis of biological, geographical and socio-cultural considerations. They behave so not so much as planets in their orbits, which, although in motion, are passive, because they are not free to make their decisions regarding directions or pace. The planets move only inasmuch as they are being moved. Today, there is a whole range of travelers: business travelers, nomads, commuters, migrant workers, refugees, soldiers, diplomats, tourists and immigrants, exiles, prisoners, settlers and displaced persons. People were travelers for the longest period in their History. For many millennia humans lived as nomads. Comprehensive sedentary and settled ways of living are related to agriculture; hence they form a very short historical period. Today, however, although a large part of life is characterized by a new mobility, most people still eat, sleep, work and recover at the same place. The thinking of the middle and older generation is in any case marked by the stable, sedentary way of life.

In our language there is a plethora of terms that come from the area of mobility. Life is labeled a journey or a pilgrimage. We speak of transition, ascension and welfare. Words like companion, leader and follower have their origin also in the experience of



traveling. Before there were paved roads and air-conditioned buses and airplanes, traveling could be a tedious affair. It is hardly surprising that in such circumstances, pilgrimage in most religions were given a special meaning because it was considered a cathartic act. Pilgrimage is an expression of the idea that traveling has a cleansing, purifying effect. At the same time, the positive aspects of leaving home were discovered early. Who was removed from his home, had escaped the pressures of everyday life. Travelers were able to establish a new identity. Today, traveling is, in the public consciousness, pleasure par excellence. Many forget on that account that traveling is not only tourism with its recreational opportunities. Traveling as a businessman, politician or journalist means hard work. This difference in the travel experience already points to a more fundamental problem: No two travelers perceive one and the same place in the same way.

There are three phases that every travel has in common: departure, passage and arrival. German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was among those who believed that every departure has a painful side to it. He believed that it is profoundly contrary to human nature, to leave his home. I will analyze Heidegger's view on leaving home and estrangement in a further chapter. However, many departures were indeed forced departures - and it starts literally with Adam and Eve. In contrast to the hero who searches self-knowledge and self-realization through adventure, the forced journey is from the outset a non heroic affair: the traveler is not driven by their own motives, but by necessity or chance or by disaster, a crime or breach of any given norm. In most cases, it is a journey of no return, or even an endless Odyssey. He who travels, compares. And everything becomes relative. That is why it is impossible to continue to believe in a chosen people, yet many believe, even the well-traveled, that their own religion or their own economic system is superior and should be imposed on other cultures and peoples, be it through missionary or military efforts. In their understanding, the colonial powers entered virgin territories that did not belong to anyone. Thus they discovered these territories and therefore were allowed to make property claims to them. Whoever arrives somewhere, is, on arrival, a stranger to the new environment. Every society has its own way of dealing with newcomers. An old English proverb says that the stranger, who is not a tradesman, is an enemy. The ancient Greeks had a different relationship to foreigners: they justified their hospitality to strangers, even if they came

as beggars, claiming that the stranger might be a god or a messenger of god. This belief is echoed in the bible in accordance with Jesus and his word in the gospel of Matthew: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

## Chapter Two: Places and Identity

### 2.1. *Zelig* (Woody Allen, 1983)



Figure 7: Compilation of four Film stills from *Zelig* (Woody Allen, 1983)

Does a person (or a location), who is able to change his or her appearances, behaviors or attitudes, so as to be comfortable in any situation or narrative, have a proper identity? In the mockumentary film *Zelig* (Fig. 7), Woody Allen represents the protagonist Leonard Zelig, who has a specific kind of identity problem: in order to avoid trouble with his contemporaries, he assumes any opinion, any worldview, philosophy or religion that he feels is appropriate to be in synch with the person he is with, or in Lacan's terminology, the 'big Other'. Leonard Zelig is the typical awkward character, in his attempt to comply with every social norm, if not to say, social pressure. Interviewed in one of the witness shots, the real-world psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim (1903-1990), who has a cameo appearance in *Zelig*, makes the following comment:

The question of whether Zelig was a psychotic or merely extremely neurotic was a question that was endlessly discussed among his doctors. Now I myself felt his feelings were really not all that different from the normal, what one would call the well-adjusted, normal person, only carried to an extreme degree, to an extreme extent. I myself felt that one could really think of him as the ultimate conformist. (Gabbard, 1999: 263-264)

The definition of awkwardness could reside in a strong feeling of helplessness and anxiety that accompanies the violation or absence of clear rules regarding social norms. It arises when someone commits a socially embarrassing act, such as telling a sexist joke or it could occur in situations where there are no real social expectations, for example, in encounters between people from very different cultural backgrounds where there is no third meta-culture to mediate the interaction in order to temper the cultural shock. In both cases, one is thrown into a situation in which one doesn't know what to do. However, this violation or complete lack of social norms doesn't simply undo the social bond.

Instead, awkwardness is a particularly powerful social experience, in which we feel the presence of others much more acutely; and more than that, awkwardness spreads, making even innocent bystanders feel somehow caught up in the awkward feeling. This raw feeling of social connection can cause anxiety, that, in any real encounter, awkwardness comes first and social norms are an attempt to cope with it, but that is only true for an individual or group capable of empathy. (Kotsko, 2012: 5)

The sociopath lacks empathy or social connection and this lack makes him or her a master in manipulating social norms. However, people who suffer from awkwardness are typically overwhelmed by the intensity of their ability to connect socially. Thus we might say that at second glance, the sociopath is diametrically opposed to the awkward character. To understand why this connection might exist, it is helpful to distinguish between the violation and the lack of a social norm. Often, it is impossible to distinguish clearly between these situations, since in many cases it is uncertain how to react when a social norm is violated. Social norms sometimes function as straightforward commandments: for example, it is an unwritten law for the people of Lisbon to queue up in line when waiting for a cable car, but if someone doesn't follow this law, they fail to prescribe a punishment and they are unable to appoint a person who is qualified to administer it. As a result, when someone, mostly a tourist from a place where queuing up isn't the norm, does take a short cut to the cable car entrance, there seems to be

nothing anyone can do. In fact, the person who decides to confront the offender may well come out looking inappropriate in the situation, because in many cultures people avoid unnecessary confrontation. If we were to define the everyday sociopath, it would be the one who is not only shameless enough to take the short cut in the first place, but who would rather try to shame the person who calls out the violation. In a broader historical context, it would be suitable to compare the sociopath with the colonizer and the awkward with the immigrant. The colonial, occupying power exports and imposes its customs and language. The immigrant is expected to learn the language of his host country and behave with respect to its traditions. As a result, identity is not so much a question of place of birth anymore but rather a question of knowing how to exert, comply to or subvert social pressure, in other words, to conform. In an emerging globally mobilized society, identity will thus be defined by the ability to synchronize sentiments and actions. A trans-cultural phenomenon like territorial (spatial) conquest and colonization will thus lose importance to trans-human (hybrid in the sense of machine-master / human-slave) relations, and temporal conquest, respectively. In the age of mobility, we have to be prepared to develop an identity of time, an identity, which is not tied to a place: Like Leonard Zelig's identity, this would be a flexible, temporal identity.

## 2.2. Subjective concepts of place

By ancient understanding, a place founded and provided sense for its residents. Their identities were built by the stories that had taken place at this location. Places comprised a closed system of signs, actions and images, to which only the locals had the key, while foreigners could merely be visitors, who were not familiar with the local codes. So places were downright synonymous with cultures. The fieldwork of ethnologists that happened on the spot was only possible because one place was different in its system of signs from other places. Marc Augé (b.1935) describes this concept of place in his essay *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, while he simultaneously states that this concept is now obsolete for the ethnologist. In advanced modernity, which the author calls 'surmodernité', spaces of transit have replaced the old geography of fixed locations. Communication space has replaced traditional

geographical areas. The transport systems that operate in these new territories, according to Augé, culminate in the messaging system of global networks. The perspectives on a certain place develop out of a physical determinism, and the environment has to be viewed as one unified unit that has a direct impact on the behavior of people, and on their perception of the human-environment relationships that always produce dynamic and interactive feedbacks.

The use of the word location is therefore always inspired by a phenomenology, which highlights a subjective experience of one's own origins. Within my psychogeographical research I use the term location on the basis of a transaction view: a geographical place, that has acquired relevance and importance through the interaction of humans with the place, and these interactions attach to it a narrative space, which causes always already a distorted perspective, since it operates within each subjective transactional context. Sedentary dwelling in one place becomes increasingly difficult in a global and consistently mobilized consumer society, at the same time the concepts of here and elsewhere lose their compelling logic and consequently, their symbolic efficiency, since consumer culture, as well as corporate culture are based on the concept of unity, sameness and flatness. This derived from militarism and the uniformity concept *esprit de corps*, which is the ultimate expression of any ideology. The abolition of diversity and increasing uniformity (single currency, elimination of linguistic diversity, etc.) is achieved through a symbolic castration. At the same time, only this compulsive unification creates a certain freedom, an opportunity for dissent, which is seemingly impossible in a permissive society. A gap can open up in the parallax between the signifier and the signified.

### 2.3. Social identity

Social identity is defined by the groups that we deem to belong to, whereas personal identity is also defined by what distinguishes us from other people, especially from those in the group that determines our social identity. In a religious context, I may first of all consider myself a Christian, and that determines my overall social identity, and then I specify, I may be a Jesuit, practicing, moderate etc. In my quality as a consumer my social identity would be based on the fact that I prefer Apple products,

while my individual identity or personality is related to the unique combination of applications that I have installed on my iPhone. Our personal identity consists of unique and personal qualities. Within psychology, there are many different theories about how identity develops and how it is structured. Obviously, we construct our personal identity in interaction with others and we want to distinguish ourselves from others. From early childhood on we develop a self-image, which is formed as a result of the reflection of the people around us. This process continues as long as we live. We get an understanding of ourselves only in relation to what we see in other people, and how other people perceive us. The individual knowledge of belonging to certain social groups, and beyond this mere fact, the emotions and values that are generated as a member of these groups define our social identity. Nationality, culture, religion, social status, family, etc. are important elements that define social identity, while at the same time this social identity functions as an integral part of the self-understanding of individuals, of their personal identity. People restructure their perception of themselves and others by social means of abstract categories, and this perception is a core aspect of their self-concept. This eventually creates group behavior.

In any given situation, different combinations of the self-concept will show, and these combinations are at times difficult to reconcile. This also means that we have to admit at our center various self-images, which is difficult for us, since this could point to a certain inconsistency. Some parts of our identity will, in certain situations, remain silent. If we find ourselves in a situation, where contradictory or even rivaling self-images are required of us, our identity will plunge in a crisis. In some contexts, our behavior becomes stronger influenced by group membership than in other contexts, especially in conflicts between groups (political parties, competing companies). The social comparison theory assumes that people see themselves and their group in a rather positive light and less negative. People tend to attribute to the groups to which they belong rather positive properties, even if the same group is perceived from the outside as fraught with negative characteristics. This happens because we are motivated to gain and maintain a positive self-esteem. People only start to sympathize with other groups if their own group no longer permits a positive self-esteem. If Zelig could be labeled the ultimate conformist, one must admit that whenever we change our opinions, attitudes or

behavior in response to the presence of others, be it real persons or the imagined ‘big Other’, we are experiencing conformity.

Informative conformity often occurs in situations in which there is high uncertainty and ambiguity. In an unfamiliar situation, we are likely to shape our behavior to match that of others. The actions of others inform us of the customs and accepted practices in a situation. Others inform us of what is right to do, how to behave in new situations. In addition to conforming to the group norms due to lack of knowledge, we also conform when we want to be liked by the group. This type of conformity, called normative conformity, is the dominant form of social conformity when we are concerned about making a good impression in front of a group. Though we may disagree secretly with the group opinion, we may verbally adopt the group stance so that we seem like a team player rather than a deviant. (Zimbardo, 2006-2015)

That means that people do not only conform to social norms to avoid awkward situations, due to lack of knowledge, but also conform when they want to be liked by a group. This is called normative conformity, and it is the dominant form of social conformity when people want to be accepted by a group and need to make a good impression when exposed to that group. Even when a person disagrees secretly with the dominant opinions in a group, he may pretend to adopt the group stance so that he can be seen as a team player rather than a deviant.

Muzafer Sherif analyzed the role of social influence in perception, and his experiments have come to be known as the ‘autokinetic effect experiments’. Sherif’s studies of autokinetic movement have shown that groups of human beings created mental evaluation norms. The experiment put a small group of people in a totally dark room, and then a small dot of light is projected onto a wall. After a short while, the dot appears to move, but in fact it does not move at all. This effect is generated inside the head: because of the total darkness, there is a complete lack of a frame of reference for the movement. Three participants, who had to enter the dark room and watch the light, are then asked to estimate how far the dot of light moves. The group is asked to say those estimates aloud and with repeated trials, each group of three converges on an estimate. While some groups agreed on a high estimate, other groups estimated a low distance, and some were in-between. The critical finding is that each group of three found their own level, their own social norm of perception. Later, when members of each group were tested individually in the dark room, they replicated their original estimate that was established in the group sessions. This points out that the group had an

influence that was informational, not coercive; the members of the group continued to perceive individually what they had agreed to in the group. Sherif concluded that each individual internalizes his or her original group's way of seeing the world. Because the autokinetic effect is entirely a result of a person's flawed perceptual system, Sherif's research is evidence of how the influence of a social constellation affects the way people understand their own physical and psychological sensations.

Similarly, when some shots of a blue sky and of the ocean near Cádiz would be inserted into a montage sequence of the city of Havana, it is clear that these shots would conform into the narrative of Havana. Nobody would question if they had actually been filmed in Havana or not. The more convincing montage sequence of actual Havana footage would thus exert a powerful hegemony over the false, yet more ambivalent images of Cádiz. Likewise, we must assume, that the same footage of Cádiz, when watched later by the same group of spectators, this time not shown as part of the montage sequence of Havana, but rather as single shots, would still qualify as Havana, through the same process of internalization.

#### 2.4. Influence of local culture on Identity

If people cannot leave their social group, they will negate or deny the negative qualities of the group or interpret them anew, as positive self-concepts. With regard to the maintenance of a positive self-esteem, this means that people tend to go to places that are enhancing their positive self-esteem, and away from locations that have a negative impact on their self-esteem. It has also been shown that people had a stronger bond to one place, the less they were able to look at the negative aspects of the place. Location-based identity thus can only be considered as the degree of individual integration into a group that is related to a place, as described in the larger concept of self. Location-based identity is a mixture of memories, ideas, interpretations, ideas and associated feelings about specific physical experiences in this place and the reviews of these experiences.

To settle down, to become sedentary in one place, is a part of the local identity, but the local identity is more than just to settle down in one place. Local identity is a foundation of self-identity, as well as race, gender and social class, and this identity is shaped by knowledge of the environment. This knowledge can be organized into two



categories; the first consisting of memories, thoughts, values and attitudes, and the second type resides in the relationship between different local networks (family, school, neighborhood). Identity develops when children learn to distinguish themselves from the people around them, and in the same manner local identity works when a child learns to see himself as part of the physical environment. Among the first identity determinants are factors that are rooted in the earliest experiences of the child - with toys, clothes, rooms and so on. The family house is the first environment, followed by the neighborhood and the school. At this time, social skills and the dynamics of relationships are learned, and it is through this viewing angle, by which the child may later recognize, rate and create places. Changes in the location-based identity occur throughout a person's lifetime. Some key features of local identity can be described: consistency, recognition, importance, challenge, mediation, change, fear and defense. Location-based identity creates a mental, cognitive database; against any new physical location experience is matched. However, the term 'location-based identity' encompasses a rather static approach to identity, it does not provide much detail on structure and process, but refers to schemes.

The closed and well-defined places of the past are now fragmented or so infiltrated that they are no longer distinguishable from other places, unless in the symbolic realm. Or they survive only in pictures, which no longer correspond to real places. Something similar happens to local cultures that one can no longer find in their ancestral place, but in a museum or a state park. Yet places do not disappear without a trace, but leave traces in a multi-layered palimpsest, in which both old and new ideas have been deposited and taken root. Memory space (*lieu de mémoire*) is a concept related to memory not as an individual, but a collective dimension. Certain objects, places or events can have special significance that is related to a group's remembrance. The concept has been developed by French historian Pierre Nora (b.1931). He defines "memory space as complex. At once natural and artificial, simple and ambiguous, concrete and abstract, they are lieux - places, sites, causes - in three senses - material, symbolic and functional." (Nora, 1997: 14) But today they are more likely to become locations in memory. Global media has brought about a transformation in the understanding of the spatial. The concept of place is no longer attached to the physical location, according to Joshua Meyrowitz (b.1949): "Electronic media led to a nearly

total dissociation of physical place and social place” (Meyrowitz, 1985: 115) Instead of physically moving to places, the places come to us, in the form of pictures. Meyrowitz writes in *The rise of Glocality*: “We are always in place and place is always with us” (Meyrowitz, 2005: 21) and the pictorial presence of absent places is indeed an old anthropological experience. However, the ratio of the merely spectral and real places is inverting. The more places turn into binary data sets, the more these places occupy and dominate the images that we produce in our own bodies. The philosopher Jeff Malpas writes: “Media and communications technologies brought changes in the *experience* of place.” (Malpas, 2012: 27-28)

Cognitive structures arise usually from the consciousness of an individual, which is dominated by social and personal perceptions of physical constellations in the environment. “The more our sense of self and experience is linked to interactions through media, the more our physical locales become the backdrop for these other experiences rather than our full life spaces.” (Meyrowitz, 2005: 26-27) These experiences are deemed much more relevant than the place. Identity has to be seen as a dynamic, social process that results from the interaction of different capacities of consciousness, wherein memory organizes and designs specific experiences.

Identity can be regarded both as a structure and as a method. The structure of identity is manifested by our thoughts, actions and influences. This model knows no distinction between personal and social identity, but only distinguishes between the content of identity and its value. The content contains what has been previously described as personal and social identity, and the dimension of value divides this content in positive or negative value categories. The organization of the content is hierarchical, but not static. The organization of the elements may vary, depending on the situation and on the demands of the social context.

The structures of identity are also regulated by adaptation and assimilation. By incorporating new components, adjustments are made in the existing structure. The formation process of identity is a result of filters of different principles, and these principles depend on the local culture. However, there are always aspects of identity that derive from places, where they first arise, because places are symbols that provide meaning and significance. The function of a place can be defined as a site, where

meetings take place, and at these meeting points experiences are made and exchanged, so the places represent a variety of personal memories regarding these meetings, and because places function as socio-historical matrixes of relations between groups, they also represent common history social memory. Places would not have lasting significance, if they didn't carry the once stored narratives with them; nonetheless, their meaning has to be constantly renegotiated and thus their contribution to identity is never the same. Places that are perceived as new or strange, influence identity through attenuation or accentuation, the filters of an already formed identity can perceive a new location either positive and liberating, or negative, as a threat and a dislocation. Places are then nested into the content identity (from my room to my country). The nesting can be defined as a result of intertwined social and personal meanings that do not necessarily represent a product of a geographical hierarchy. Identity principles are closely related to coping strategies, which means that social identification with a group runs parallel and is similar to the processes that take place in relation to the identification with locations. Decisive for a local identity theory is the desire to belong. Identity, our own concept of self, is therefore always in flux, and our partial identities are made up of many different categories of identity, and places are one category among many, such as class, education, gender, family and other social roles.

Many street photographers report that people today are much more cautious and skeptical when they know that they or their belongings will be photographed. They are skeptical because they sense that the image can theoretically be put in any semantic context and the intention and the anticipation of this context is generated from digital semiosis and then represents their life stories. This narrative is never an abstract-geometric or aesthetic category, it is always a moral category, which reverberates life and influences it. The purely objective, factual world becomes the world of experience and verdict. The stories of individuals and their images merge. Sometimes individuals get caught in an image that is imposed on them, against their will. When we talk about natives, for example, we always refer, in our minds, to certain groups of people who live in particular places over many generations. The fact that there are not many natives anymore shows to what extent identity is now defined independently from one original location. The way we perceive indigenous people points to our perverted desire to

belong: whenever a native tribe is discovered, people want to preserve it, they want to prevent these natives from making contact with our regular, mobile society.

Here it shows that our perspective has completely internalized the separating media screen. We are accustomed to talk about them, not with them, to keep them at bay, supposedly for their own good. Our merely symbolic, non-physical view of the natives deprives them from the outset from their right to humanity, and the resulting ubiquitous cynicism is certainly due to the fact that the preservation of their culture mainly occurs in the form of ghettos, reservations, all in the name of a misconceived humanism. In reality, the distinction between indigenous and presently living people in a region is palpable by marginalization of the original or native inhabitants of a region. In fact, they are referred to as minorities or ethnic groups. When Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) discovered America and mistook it to be India, people in Europe referred to all natives as Indians, because Columbus wanted to prove his theory correct, at all cost. This is another example of hegemony: power demands conformity, even if this conformity runs counter against all evidence or facts.

## 2.5. Bio-graphy and Geo-graphy

Past and present do not stand in absolute contrast, neither in the case of images nor in the case of places: Already in our everyday experience, things look rather complex. Even if we live in or visit a real place, we see it in a different light (one could also speak of the inner eye) as soon as we remind ourselves of this place in another time. It happens that we go to a place in order to look for the place that it has seized to be. The same site is viewed by different generations or by strangers with a different gaze. It does not even need a physical change in the appearance of the site, to change the place for us when we see it again after a long absence. It has turned into an image, which we have stored in our memory, and by which we measure its current state. The shift between location and image, between perception and memory is one of the conditions of any true experience of place. The life story represents the process in which the fusion of place and person take place. This story, this narrative offers, through semiosis, the possibility to look for clues not only in the corresponding factual life and its associated locations, but also in the ways these have been communicated, in past and

present media, public or private. It is this type of representation of the past that makes the past relevant in a contemporary world. If people had no ties to a place, there would be no (present) culture.

Culture is the space where many life stories meet; the collective memory of a space anticipates the design of a grand narrative, the landscape of collective consciousness. Life stories are solipsistic. Subjectivity retreats to a more distanced, critical view: through distancing, the bigger picture becomes visible. Society can thus be seen as a meta-narrative, which involves thousands of individual stories. One can reflect on certain objects, things, but also on pure signs, since they are attached to memories. By focusing on a three-dimensional description, the narrator organizes all the elements and their relationships according to his own attitude towards History as well as towards his own identity. Encounters in real public spaces are by definition volatile, and encounters depend on a common horizon, a horizon that does not exist by default. This common horizon has to be constructed. Street photography exists to document the dynamics of these fleeting encounters and to give them a form (gestalt).

A direct encounter means every time that mutually constitutive, hybrid identities have to be produced. A proof of the sustainability of these identities lies in the images. The images exist to assure us our own identity, and in individual encounters or conversations these images are hybridized, precisely in order to create a common horizon. The 'selfie', a picture that two or more persons take of themselves, is the contemporary expression of the desire for common horizons.

### **Chapter Three: Alienation**

#### **3.1. *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, 2002)**

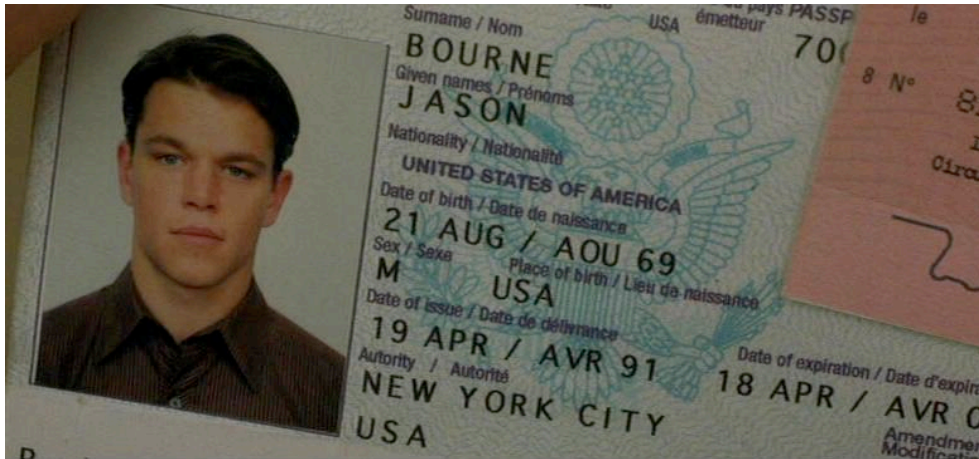


Figure 8: Film still from *The Bourne Identity* (Doug Liman, 2002)

A recent example of a film about the loss of identity is *The Bourne Identity* (Fig. 8). Jason Bourne suffers from complete amnesia. He doesn't know who he is neither where he is from. The place he finds himself in is completely unfamiliar to him. But even if it were the place he was from, he wouldn't know; because of his memory loss he is unable to recognize it. He is alienated. So he starts his personal quest for identity by examining the only remaining hints in his personality: his capacities, or in other words, not his cognitive memory, which is erased, but his bodily memory, the hard-wired part of his existence. In the film, Jason Bourne apparently survived a shipwreck floating in the ocean and he has no idea who he is. In the course of the story, he finds out that he is unexpectedly very skilled at everything he does: he speaks many languages, masters different kinds of hand-to-hand combat, he's an excellent stunt driver, etc. His skills also extend to the interpersonal realm: the very first woman he meets becomes his partner and then his lover. The explanation behind these almost supernatural skills and his loss of identity is that Bourne had been subjected to an elite CIA training program. However, that training has a direct connection to Bourne's amnesia, since it is the goal of the program to create agents who serve as 'sleepers'. The training ends with a thorough brainwashing, after which the agents don't remember that they are agents until they are awakened and send on a mission. The life the CIA sets up for the agent is that of a remote-controlled puppet, which can be left behind at any time. Later it is revealed that Bourne's superiors only regarded him as truly complete once they had induced him to kill someone he believed to be an innocent man. The movie makes clear, that ruthless

amorality combined with a total lack of social ties are the necessary core personality traits which make all the technical superpowers work in order to serve a higher purpose. In the course of the story, there are other people who remember Bourne, and whose faces are somehow not completely strange to him, but who he cannot, through the cognitive amnesia, actualize. This is a reminder of embarrassing situations when we see a familiar face on the street but are totally unable to identify it. Mostly the key to resolving these blocks is to think of a different context: It is the girl at the cash register of the supermarket we frequent regularly, and where she is always wearing a uniform; we see her at the supermarket on a regular basis but her face never really made it into our cognitive memory. Nonetheless, her face has been captured somewhere, subconsciously.

A recent example of a collective quest for identity can be found in the case known as ‘Maddie’. However, this case reverses the case of Jason Bourne in *The Bourne Identity*, where there is a body without an identity, while in the case of Maddie, there’s an identity without a body. Maddie is the nickname of the British girl Madeleine McCann who disappeared without trace when she was on holidays with her parents in Portugal’s Algarve. In the newspapers we have all been presented a photograph of her: she was four years old at the time of her disappearance; as the years go by, it becomes tricky to continue to be on the lookout for a girl with the depicted features. Maddie, assumed that she is still alive, would look different now, and Scotland Yard regularly issues (presents) an actualized, but nonetheless virtual image (not a photograph in the strict sense of the term), which is produced with the help of a so-called age progression computer software, using the same principles of forensic science used by the police to work out what missing children such as Madeleine McCann would look like today. Though these images may indeed be very helpful for police investigations, they remain mere assumptions of how Maddie could look like, since nobody is able to provide an accurate, actual photograph of Maddie (fig. 9).



Figure 9: The parents of Madeleine ‘Maddie’ McCann, presenting an image, generated with age progression software, of how her vanished daughter could look like today.

These presentations are science fiction in the strict sense of the term, since they depict a possible, yet imaginary future in the same way that the film *Blade Runner* shows a possible, yet imaginary version of Los Angeles in the year 2019.

These examples should illustrate the different qualities of (analog) representation and (digital) presentation. The question that is at the heart of these cases is a very pertinent one: How is an identity to be conceived? Why can’t the protagonist, Bourne, just keep on living happily without one? Why is it, that adopted children at a certain point want to know who their real parents are, instead of just being happy living in that well-heeled, caring family that they are now a member of? Why do so many immigrants have the urge to go back to the places where they come from, even if these places are miserable and they could be so much better off in the first world country that was so generous and hospitable towards them? The answers to these questions can only be found in the profound analog nature of our lives. There is a narrative attached to our physical bodies and this narrative has its own dramatic structure. It starts with birth and ends with death. These boundaries are the core of our identity, even if the promise of the digital age is to sweep away these boundaries, or at least, stretch them:

A large framed photograph takes pride of place on the coffee table of Amanda Beck's



living room. It's a blown-up portrait of a handsome young man in a blue polo shirt, the kind any mother would be proud to display of her 18-year-old son. The picture is of Amanda's eldest child. But not as he looks today - it's a computer-generated image of what Ricky might have looked like if he were still alive. But Ricky was killed when he was hit by a car, aged nine, on a summer's day in 1997. The death of a child is the ultimate fear for every parent, a trauma too awful to contemplate. But while photographic age progression of dead children may seem maudlin, for some parents seeing how a child might have grown up is a comfort – a way of coming to terms with an adulthood they will never witness. Yet even if it's a consolation of sorts, it's still a practice that raises questions. Are these images fantasy projections that extend the grieving process and stand in the way of parents moving on with their lives? Are they a ruthless exploitation of the bereaved who long for a glimpse of their child's face as it would have been? (Carey, 2014)

The other core ingredients of our life narratives are conflict and resolution. Of course, we like convenience and are told to avoid conflict, but then again, what would a life without conflict be? Wouldn't it taste a bit bland? Could we say, lying on our deathbed, that we have lived a full life, without any conflicts, without having faced - and probably overcome - challenges? Again, inasmuch as all physical experiences are proximal to our physical bodies, identity must be conceived in the realm of the Real, it cannot be conceived in the realm of the Symbolic.

If we further compare the identity of a person to the identity of a place, we could conclude, that a place turned into a location, or a site transformed into a sight, is, ideally a sort of a *white cube*, a room without substance (subject), ready to assume any identity. One example of such a subject would be an art gallery. In a gallery, art and artists come and go, everyone involved trying to come up with something; at times new and unheard of, at times rather conventional, but always as something in its own right.

And in its midst, one notices an evenly lighted "cell" that appears crucial to making the thing work: the gallery space. The history of modernism is intimately framed by that space. Or rather the history of modern art can be correlated with changes in that space and in the way we see it. We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the space first. (A cliché of the age is to ejaculate over the space on entering a gallery.) An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of 20th-century art. And it clarifies itself through a process of historical inevitability usually attached to the art it contains. The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is "art." The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics. So powerful are the perceptual fields of force within this chamber that once outside it, art can lapse into secular status- and conversely.

Things become art in a space where powerful ideas about art focus on them. Indeed the object frequently becomes the medium through which these ideas are manifested and proffered for discussion- a popular form of late modernist academicism ("ideas are more interesting than art"). The sacramental nature of the space becomes clear, and so does one of the great projective laws of modernism: as modernism gets older, context becomes content. In a peculiar reversal, the object introduced into the gallery "frames" the gallery and its laws. (O'Doherty, 1999: 14-15)

After Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), in the context of an art gallery, objects such as a trash bin or a standing ashtray run the risk to have an identity projected onto them, which makes them look like sacred objects, just as the fire extinguisher in a museum of modern art looks not like a fire extinguisher but encapsulates an esthetic conundrum, which circles around the question if the fire extinguisher is part of the artwork or part of the museum. (Fig.10).



Figure 10: *Fire Chief*(Richard Roth, 1988)

A commercial gallery is a cold medium, just in the same way as Facebook or TV or money, for that matter, are cold media. It doesn't matter who's going to fill up the space, just as with money it's not important *how* you've made it, as long as you've made it. The white walls of the gallery will add surplus value to whatever they display. It is the mechanism that symbolizes the immaterial economy of social relations in its

essence. Therein the gallery space resembles a divine space where the objective and unmoving concept of ever being present reigns above the axis of the flow of past, present and future; a space where bodies may enter, but where they are not assumed.

Human space on the contrary means subjective space; ageing means changing in time and it is typically accompanied by an existential worry about the probable consequences of divine predestination and simple fear of death. The circle of life determines human space. Monuments, which, in contrast to art that is shown in gallery space, are designed to be on display longer than a human lifetime, express man's age-old desire to exceed the closed circle determined by life and death, that is why they are usually sized 'bigger than life'. The very recent attribution of value and the protection of antiquities must be seen as a desperate attempt to find resilience in the material attributes of the past against the inevitable demands, which come along with the constant changes of the immaterial economy. One might say that the sudden importance that the task of protecting antiquities has gained in the 20th century is a reflex against modernism and it has evolved as a protest against the predominant philosophy of first abstract, then discrete space as the aesthetical flow of modernism, which is based on disembodiment. Both of these paradigms proceed from the same causes and echo the perception and proceedings around indigenous people.

### 3.2. Strangeness means not being at home

It has been argued that the term *home* originated as a response and demarcation to a world that was perceived as increasingly alienated. *Home* functions as an instrument of self-assurance, guidance and reference. In the introduction to *Metaphysics* (1953), Martin Heidegger tried an essential definition of the term 'alienation': Alienation coincides, according to Heidegger, with a movement that is fundamentally directed at the strange, the unknown. By traveling, one becomes a stranger - so movement is the basis for the process of alienation, it means both leaving behind a place (poria), as well as crossing the boundaries of a place. However, moving towards the unknown has not necessarily to be understood in mere geographical terms. Heidegger describes strangeness in the following passage:

Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder - the revelation of the nothing - does the "why?" loom before us. Only because the "why" is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds, and ground them. Only because we can inquire and ground is the destiny of our existence placed in the hands of the researcher. The question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, in question. It is a metaphysical question. (Heidegger, 1929)

Heidegger's claim in *Being and Time* is that the human being finds himself embedded in a richly meaningful world with which he feels deeply connected. That is what makes the world homely (heimlich) from the outset. With estrangement comes a sensation of anxiety, and this sensation changes the perception of the world. Just like a traveler who, upon arrival in a foreign place, discovers that neither his language nor his customs and morals are of any use in this different culture, the feeling of being strange can apply to any situation where one does not feel 'at home' any longer. Suddenly, the mood of anxiety renders the world alien and meaningless. What seemed meaningful appears as an inauthentic spectacle, a sort of pointless bustle of activity. With anxiety, the everyday world unravels and home becomes strange, even uncanny (unheimlich). From being immersed in the game of life, one becomes a distanced observer of a play that is no longer full of meaning.

Heidegger suggests that there is a given sense of home, but that the state of man is to be in motion, which means, that all man must inevitably become a stranger. Given the fact that people were nomads for the longer part of their History, we must conclude that settling is perhaps the real starting point of what we call civilization, or culture. In a time of increasing mobility, what does it mean to transgress, to violate borders, or to leave home? What do we have to exceed or leave behind in order to be qualified as strangers? Also, it must be asked whether the fact of being a stranger is exclusively defined externally or whether strangeness could also stem from or correspond to an inner feeling. Furthermore, it is necessary to clarify whether the congruence of an external strangeness and an internal (perceived) foreignness shall always prevail. These questions are worthwhile to be reconsidered, especially if territorial borders have become permeable and change permanently.

With the demise of Eurocentric thinking there is no longer an absolute strange place, nor a central homeland. The dichotomy of metropolis and province resonates increasingly ineffective. Together with the earlier, now outdated territorial concept of a stable, geo-politically informed identity, this could be a sign of the increasing dispersion, which was initiated by the processes of globalization and digitization. Permeability and degradation of all borders and territories lead to a loss of orientation, between a habitable interior and an uninhabitable exterior and the definition of a boundary between these spheres. It is important to underline that this general disorientation that is already spatially inscribed in the metaphor of globalization, leads to far-reaching consequences when it comes to the legal and social status of the stranger. The stranger as the one who comes from a particular place where he now is no longer, he is alien now, precisely because he is outside of his own culture. It is precisely the political instrumentalization of this strangeness, on which racism and apartheid are founded. As I will describe in more detail in chapter six 'Drawing lines', mediatization and discrimination go hand in hand:

Apartheid: by itself the word occupies the terrain like a concentration camp. System of partition, barbed wire, crowds of mapped out solitudes. Within the limits of this untranslatable idiom, a violent arrest of the mark, the glaring harshness of abstract essence seems to speculate in another regime of abstraction, that of confined separation. The word concentrates separation, raises it to another power and sets separation itself apart: 'apartitionality'. At every point, like all racisms, it tends to pass segregation off as natural- and as the very law of the origin. Such is the monstrosity of this political idiom. There is no racism without language because it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse – racism always betrays the perversion of man, the 'talking animal'. It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates. (Derrida, 1985: 292)

Our self-concepts are composed out of two parts. One part holds everything that makes us similar and comparative with other people, what characterizes our common ground. The other part contains what makes us dissimilar, different, an individual, singular being. If this explanation is true, it implies that there are no absolute strangers, since each stranger is a unique and special case. Subsequently there may also no such thing as a general place of origin or descent, where the stranger is rooted. The stranger can only be acknowledged as a stranger from a certain perspective, which is, automatically, the point of view of the domestic. This rather limited perspective sees the

entire substance of a stranger from a very static point of view. He who regards other people as strangers would be one who never leaves his home, not even for a short period of time. Strangeness is, therefore, only possible as an ideological category.

As a result of this ideological reduction of a complex human being on the ground of his strangeness, all other attributes that could define the individual fade into the background, they disappear into an abstract image of a stranger as someone who has only a few superficial traits of similarity with the locals (a name, a language, gender and racial characteristics, age, etc.). Hence, the stranger becomes the stranger from the point of view of a subject that is at home, that is familiar with the space within its own borders and usually lives there permanently. Thus the stranger is projected as someone who has his place outside of these limits, who fails to fit in, or, whose relationship to the place in which he has arrived is not yet known or established. Usually, the arrival of strangers offers an occasion for a thorough questioning: what do they want here? Are they just visiting, or do they stay here permanently? etc.

## **Chapter Four: Places as pictorial memory**

### **4.1. *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)**

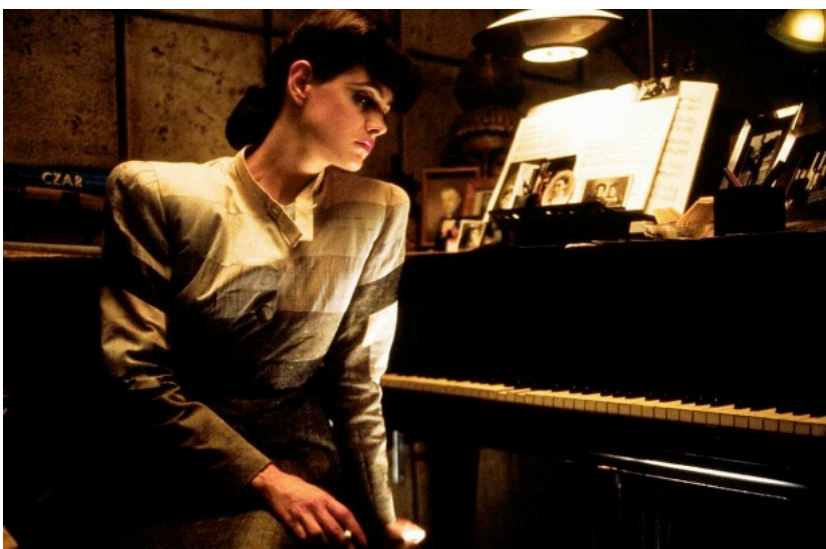


Figure 11: Film still from *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)

In the film *Blade Runner* (Fig. 11), so-called replicants, the creations of a technotycoon, named Dr Eldon Tyrell and his multiplanetary conglomerate, the Tyrell Corporation, look exactly like humans, indeed are even better looking; they have superior memory functions and are extremely intelligent; and they are physically superior to human beings, but they are not robots. Are they *ersatz* humans? According to the definition of *ersatz*, replicants are indeed not real or genuine, they are made or used as a substitute for something (humans), but in the case of the replicants, they are not, as it would be typical for an *ersatz* product, of inferior quality. Because they progressively learn to acquire real feelings and emotions, qualities rather lacking in the human beings of the film, replicants pose a security threat to those they were intended to serve; this feature led their developers to design them as fail-safe devices - by coding them genetically for a lifespan of four years. This is the planned obsolescence of replicants, who are supposedly more human than human beings, which is to say, less imperfect. What is the consequence of this? Above all it points to an important aspect of what being human actually means.

According to the film, one of the features, which distinguish replicants from humans, is their need for photographs. Without a natural memory imprinted on to their minds as if it were a photographic plate, as Benjamin describes it, replicants need to construct an artificial memory for themselves through photographs of someone else's childhood. It could be argued, however, that what marks out the very essence of what it is to be human, is exactly the capacity to gaze at a photograph and to imagine oneself in the picture. The capacity to recognize similarities is one of humankind's distinguishing features. One of the disturbing aspects of *Blade Runner* is the idea that memory could be reduced to images, thereby suggesting that corporations could be replacing the family trees among replicants with some plausible reassertion of its role in the life of humans.

In a very trivial way, some forms of replicants already exist. In the U.S., some suburban homes look as if they were built out of wood. Even when examined from a close range, the material looks like wooden panels or beams, but in fact, the panels are made out of plastic foam or they have a plastic coating, which is, in a very practical sense, more robust and resistant against weather conditions than wood (Fig. 12).



Figure 12: Decorative Faux Wood Beams

Just like the replicants in *Blade Runner* are more human than human beings, these replicant panels are more wooden than actual wood. The term *ersatz* does not apply to replicants or these fake wood panels made out of plastic, because, on a practical level, they are of superior quality than the original; at least that is what the marketing departments advertise: that they are even better than the real thing.

#### 4.2. Images as memory

Today, tourists are those who, by taking pictures, keep vivid memories of places where they do not stay for long and where they might never return. Susan Sontag (1933-2004) said, “Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. All photographs are memento mori.” (Sontag, 1977: 15). The way Sontag uses the phrase memento mori (remember you must die) highlights the profound difference of photography and the before mentioned computer generated age progression image, which suggests rather the opposite: remember that you don’t have to die. A photograph preserves faces, places and cultures in pictures before they disappear from the real world. Ethnographic photography is a famous example for that. The almost inextricable relation between places and images of places continues to spheres where we are looking for places through our eyes to which our bodies do not have access, for example “on motorways or in fronts of TVs, computers and cash machines. This invasion of the world by what



Marc Augé calls ‘non-space’ results in a profound alteration of awareness: something we perceive, but only in a partial and incoherent manner.” (Augé, 1995: Backcover) This kind of perception finds its equivalent in the view of those who suddenly rediscover the images of their own culture in museums and archives. That what was deemed familiar appears all of a sudden strange and in need of interpretation in the same ways, as did the images of other cultures before. Our brain has the natural skill of transforming places and things that fade away in time, into images and these images, once captured, are stored in memory and activated by memory. Images are our defense mechanisms against the flight of time and the loss of the space, which we experience with and in our bodies. At the same time, these images that we keep from a trip to an exotic country or from the wedding party of our best friend take on the same qualities as the replicants or the faux wood: they become even better than the real thing.

The lost places occupy our physical memory as pictures, as a place in the figurative, symbolic sense. Here they gain a presence that differs from their former presence in the world and once the image is fixated in our brain, apparently no new experience is needed. The exchange between experience and memory is an exchange between world and image. The images are henceforth involved in each new perception of the world, because the sensations are overlaid by our visual memories, which we then intentionally or unintentionally measure against new experiences. Paintings, photographs or films integrate, as objects, documents and icons effortlessly into our own image memory. Our own image memory has been condensed equally into such media, and the law of time turns all images into images of the past. Our own memory's historical authority gives us permission to participate in a community of the living and the dead. Our memory itself is an endogenous, neural system of now fictitious places of remembrance. Our cognitive agency builds up a network of places where we can only see those images that make up the fabric of our own memory.

The physical experience of places that our bodies have made in the real world, informs the design of places that our brains have saved. The mental topography in our memory has evolved by the ancient discipline of mnemonics (a trainable art of memory). It was based on a topological memory that is prefigured by the brain and that functions by linking mental images (imagines) with memory locations (loci) as stopovers or stations. This endogenous technology relies heavily on the help of

language, which has a similar topologic structure. The memory of language is, however, as is the mnemonic, an artificially created medium that is in constant in mutual exchange with the natural medium of our spontaneous memory. A similar difference exists between the technical memory of equipment, like film or digital storage cards and our bodies. Such technology transfers images to other places, while our physical memory is a natural, biological place where images are received as well as produced. The collective memory of a culture is where we get our pictures, has its technical bodies in the institutional memory of archives and visual media equipment. But this technical archive is dead if it is not held alive by collective imagination. The world's cultures, it seems, migrate to books and museums, where they are archived, in order to no longer have to be lived. They survive in documentary images (similar to the old places that are now transformed into photographs), but these pictures were dead, unrelated fragments, if they did not belong to a person's life - and can only there, through the narrative of this person, come to life.

In this sense, the physical person, the old site of images, has become a more important place of culture than the technical archive of photos, films and museums in which images are stored. Places carry stories with them, stories that have taken place in them, through these stories they have become places that are worthy of remembrance in the first place. We also carry stories (the content of our life story) in us, through which we became what we are today.

#### 4.3. Photography as an instrument of mimesis

The desire to belong manifests itself in the form of mimetic desire. Michael Taussig (b.1940) describes the mimetic faculty in *Mimesis and Alterity*:

The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power ... (this is) as necessary to the very process of knowing as it is to the construction and subsequent naturalization of identities. (Taussig, 1993: 14-15)

Walter Benjamin recognized that photography could express, like no other medium, the modern mimetic desire, precisely because in the photographic image, the gaze of the one who desires and the object of desire meet. In photography, a unique

gaze is cast on a unique object. At the same time, photography reveals the temporary, even fleeting character of that gaze, and sometimes the photographic image reveals more about the photographer than it does reveal about the object that it supposedly represents primarily. Benjamin compares the photograph with the natural phenomenon of a lightning bolt that illuminates the dark night for the fraction of a second and leaves us with an afterimage that remains a little longer on our retina before it disappears completely. The natural lightning bolt has its technical counterpart in the flashlight, and this is a prerequisite for photographic shots that would be underexposed or non-existent without it.

The analogy of the flashlight and the lightning bolt emphasizes the dialectical structure of the snapshot, which allows us to enter the interior of the author, as an afterimage on his retina, which opens its receptivity to the individual gaze, as well as to the views of the outside world, which surrounds all of us, but which we actually perceive only in enlightened moments. Most of the time the outside world seems to us bland, because it is a given, always present and therefore banal. The analogy of photography with the natural phenomenon of lightning differs in a refreshing way from the conventional concept of the camera obscura, because it emphasizes the subjective view of the photographer. The afterimage analogy questions right from the outset the technocratic objectivity of photography, that quality, which always resonates in the camera obscura – analogy. The photographic camera as a technically evolved camera obscura can basically renounce any authorship, and it is with this view, that the representatives of a scientific photography have always conveyed their faith in the objective, neutral observer quality of photography. Walter Benjamin, however, puts the afterimage on the retina at the center of his dialectics of seeing, and this afterimage is radically individual. It is not communicable and has no physical image support; it is, as an evanescent afterimage, pure memory. Benjamin refers in the following quote explicitly to the flash as a mechanism of photographic exposure, which shapes decisively the way we perceive different places and the events that take place there:

Anyone can observe that the duration for which we are exposed to impressions has no bearing on their fate in memory. Nothing prevents our keeping rooms in which we have spent twenty-four hours more or less clearly in our memory, and forgetting others in which we passed months. It is not, therefore, due to insufficient exposure time if no image appears on the plate of remembrance. More frequent, perhaps, are the cases when the half-light of habit denies the plate the necessary light for years, until one day from an

alien source it flashes as if from burning magnesium powder, and now a snapshot transfixes the room's image on the plate. Nor is this very mysterious, since such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we are beside ourselves, and while our waking, habitual, everyday self is involved actively or passively in what is happening, our deeper self rests in another place and is touched by the shock, as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match. (Benjamin, 1997: 342-343)

It is interesting to look at Walter Benjamin's statements through a present-time prism, because photography had been an innovation in his time. It contributed by technologically shedding light to the history of reception just as a lightning bolt sheds light on a dark land at night. A photographic snapshot, taken perhaps with a flashlight, managed to show many new perspectives and new universes. With these new forms of perception, it held also enormous social revolutionary potential. The massive presence of photographic images today, however, creates a new twilight of habit. In the times of mass production of photographs and the omnipresence of technical images, media defines a new collective form of perception, and thus our mediated environment forms the new twilight of the habit, where a single photographic image can hardly develop any revolutionary force. Today it is not so much the light bulb, which can trigger a revolutionary momentum, but rather a blackout in a thoroughly illuminated, over-exposed world; the sudden interference of archaic and chaotic darkness.

#### 4.4. Images and art as psychological substitutes (*ersatz*)

Benjamin suggests in his theory of mimesis, that especially children have mimetic abilities, they identify easily with what they perceive in their environments, and assimilate into another, imaginary world. One should not reduce mimesis here to the term used by Plato (424/423–348/347 BC) - that would be imitation. Rather, mimesis should be read with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, like much in Walter Benjamin's writings, as a mimesis, which pursues a creative engagement with its subject matter. Mimesis is expressed as imitation, but the motivation behind it does not focus on the visual shape or the aesthetics of something. The motivation for mimesis is social: mimetic desire is, at its core, the desire to belong (to a community, to a place, etc.) and behind that functions the evolutionary principle of adaptation as a survival strategy. The image medium can be used as a generator of mimesis, and the protagonist

of a film can serve as model for identification, through whose eyes we may then perceive the world. When we hear a story about an unhappy person, it may make us recall similar experiences, and it may evoke empathy. However, the meaning of mimesis is not at all exhausted with this definition. Mimesis is a term that, as Freud himself has predicted, may be of great importance for aesthetics. For Benjamin, mimesis offers the opportunity to identify with the outside world. Mimesis allows us to establish a connection between others and ourselves. Mimesis is the principle, better, urge to look for similarities in the world so to establish this connection. In 1936, Benjamin could already see the advent of mass media and its function: “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things closer spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day, the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.” (Benjamin, 1968: 223)

Walter Benjamin worried that a culture of reproduction would strip History’s glow from works of art. To fully understand the meaning of mimesis with Benjamin, we must seek its origin in the process of modeling, to create a copy. In the case of music with its time-based quality, that would mean to be part of the rhythm, to march synchronously, or to dance or to clap hands. Essentially mimesis with Benjamin is an interpretive process, either aimed at forming oneself according to a model, or to make a copy or imitation of an existing model. Sigmund Freud observes in *Civilization and its Discontents*:

The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality, but they are nonetheless psychically effective, thanks to the role which fantasy has assumed in mental life. (Freud, 1953: 75)

Satisfaction is obtained from illusions, which are recognized as such without the discrepancy between them and reality being allowed to interfere with enjoyment. The region from which these illusions arise is the life of the imagination; at the time when the development of the sense of reality took place, this region was expressly exempted from the demands of reality-testing and was set apart for the purpose of fulfilling wishes which were difficult to carry out. At the head of these satisfactions through fantasy stands the enjoyment of works of art. (Freud, 1953:80)

What the hero does in the narrative on the screen creates an emotional impact in the audience. Thanks to a technical and artistic apparatus of illusion and the dramaturgy of the narrative, the audience can experience these emotions as if they were real. At

times, the magic of art and the artist is evoked and rightly so. Art is often compared to magic, and the comparison is worth a more detailed analysis: there is no doubt that art has not invented as art for art's sake. Art originally worked in the service of an impulse control, and the depicted had always functioned as a form of *ersatz*.

The bullfighter kills the bull in the place of the spectator and for the spectator (bullfighting is perhaps the most obvious example, because it is a remainder of the ancient gladiators' spectacle). The bullfighter performs the killing, so that civilized man should no longer do it, but he may still keep the illusion to kill a bull. Freud speaks of murder, incest and cannibalism as taboos, where in the last two cases in ancient societies, hygienic and genetic reasons were invoked to justify the ban. With respect to murder, prohibitions were especially vehement within the family, to avoid patricide. A totem, an object that was subsequently elevated into a work of art, was a substitute for a taboo. With the totem, fear and awe were instilled in the people, since they were reminded on the taboo, while simultaneously, the totem invoked it. Hence, the totem could be considered the first object that had an *ersatz* function, and today, it is no coincidence that the most popular mass media content circles around murder and sex.

## **Chapter Five: Structures provide “blank spaces”, where objects can be allocated**

### **5.1. *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966)**



Figure 13: Film still from *Blow-Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966)

Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Blow-Up* (Fig. 13) is a reflection on structuralism, where a variety of material and spiritual objects are being questioned about their actual and potential meaning: what is real? Why is it real? And what does that mean? The spectator, during the course of the film *Blow-Up*, has to wonder what remains from a crime scene since the body of the victim has disappeared.

In his *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze aims at displacing the opposition that defines the Platonic space, that of suprasensitive ideas and their sensible-material copies, into the opposition of substantial/opaque depth of the body and the pure surface of the sense-event. This surface depends on the emergence of language: it is the non-substantial void that separates things from words. (Žižek, 2005: 169)

The protagonist in *Blow-Up*, the photographer Thomas, embodies the discrepancies between filmmakers who are specialized in fiction films and documentary filmmakers. As long as he is in his studio, Thomas makes sure that he controls every single detail of the setup and all the compositions are his deliberate creations. This makes that some of the - female - models come across like mechanical puppets deprived of will or agency. When he goes out to take photographs in a public park (on location, which is in Italian language, Antonioni's mother tongue, 'esterno' - exterior), he is confronted with a situation that documentary filmmakers constantly find themselves in. Thomas' mind may not have switched from one circumstance to the other and he may believe that he is still in control of everything he does, but in the course of the film, the contingencies of that very situation in the park will teach him a lesson. As he takes pictures of a couple without asking for their consent, the woman, unlike the models in his studio sessions, asks him to hand the negatives over to her since he has no right to infringe her personality and privacy rights. After Thomas refuses stubbornly to do so, he goes home to develop the pictures and discovers an unexpected element in them: a hand holding a gun. He was only able to see this element when he 'blew up' the photographs to an enormous size. Again, this element constitutes a contingency, which changes the whole meaning of the pictures and which was completely beyond Thomas' control.

Thomas, who brought the controlling mindset of a studio photographer to the contingent realm of public spaces, has to learn that he had come face to face with his own blind spots. Observers produce blind spots because they try to ascribe the origin of

these blind spots to the structures themselves, unaware that the blind spots are a result of their observations, or better, it is the sheer presence of the observer that produces the blind spots. Within their observations, these blind spots appear to the observers like a mystery, but documentary filmmaking is actually to be conceived by acknowledging and by honoring one's own blind spots. Any creation of artworks operates with such forms. An originary distinction triggers a process in which connections of form are reworked by crossing the boundaries of the preceding form. The perception of the artwork similarly consists of deciphering the work's structure of distinction. In the making of distinctions the unity of the distinction remains an unobservable blind spot. The blind spot may be observed by another distinction, but then the unobservable unity of this distinction becomes the blind spot. As the unity of the unmarked state prior to observation, the 'whole' never appears in observation. It rather goes along with all observations as their blind spot, remaining transcendently presupposed. But, as a reworking of connections of forms, the artwork makes the unobservable unity of one form observable by other forms, which have their own unobservable side. In this sense, the artwork makes the invisible visible while the invisible is preserved.

That is why structures have blank spaces and puzzling objects. Curiously, these blank spaces and puzzling objects seem to drive the structure itself. Or they simply produce loops and circulate. A last, all-explaining construct, a final justification, which would situate the interconnection of structures, remains symbolically empty. Due to the blank spaces, the differential ratios are receptive to new variables and changes. In one scene, Thomas walks into an antiques shop, which is full of statues, boxes, paintings and a lot of rare objects. Thomas finally chooses a wooden propeller, which is a piece of something else, an element of an airplane. The propeller is later being placed in Thomas' studio, where it is taken completely out of its original context, far away from airports and hangars, but its new environment will certainly generate a new meaning to the propeller. The parallels between the propeller and all other objects in the film thus becomes apparent: a form or a spot within a larger structure is not only irrelevant, but also not decodable, unless a magnifying glass, or a new, and different point of view allows a new perspective and a new meaning, which then brings forth the updated nature of the investigation, and allows further interpretations. The point is that this



process of re-contextualization requires an active participation and curiosity of the observer, because, with each new perspective, new blind spots are generated.

Without the existence of a structure everything would be disorderly, chaotic matter, the desert of the Real, a confused state of things that is perceived as unpleasant. It is here of secondary importance if this structure is an a priori structure, or whether Humanity creates it more or less progressively. At the same time, structure reveals the nakedness of its elements, be it the Emperor or many other things, but this sudden existential nakedness is necessary in order to restructure, to achieve new insights and stages of development. Meaning exclusively emerges from the positions that structural objects take up in time, space and relational. With several examples Antonioni makes it clear that the plot of the film has to be thought of structurally - the riddle consists of the objects and their structural textures. Therein lies a potential for desubjectification. It is the structural indifference, which, in many cases does not attribute any individual relevance to its elements, which means, structure objectifies the subject. This is, when pushed to an extreme, dehumanizing. The romantic artist rebels against this logic; he simply rejects his role as a small wheel in the gearbox, a structure of whatever kind, and highlights his own subjectivity, his uniqueness. With structuralism, the structure is deemed more important than the elements that are placed in it, sometimes allocated in an exchangeable fashion. Meaning only emerges through the combination of the elements that the structure is made of. In structuralism, the elements themselves do not bear any inherent meaning; their meaning exists entirely in relation to the whole of the structure.

## 5.2. Semiosis: emergence of meaning

Whether we are talking about a realist or a constructivist approach to reality (and structuralism is a variation of the linguistic turn and thus of constructivism), we must admit that all the positions share the thesis that language represents a central, transcendental authority, and thus also determines what has to be considered legal and illegal expressions in a certain type of discourse. One important consequence of this is that language represents a kind of last transcendental judgment, before which all thinking must stand its ground. This thinking undermines especially those forms of art

that tend to be non-discursive or even non-cognitive. The very telling, almost compulsive tendency to immediately provide a written explanation and interpretation for each work of art is only a symptom of this linguistic hegemony. Thus, it becomes impossible to explain how radical change or historical discontinuity can be possible, if, from the outset, that discontinuity requires the introduction of something new, something that would not be recognized within the limits of language. The genuinely new is yet not noticeable when it comes into being already translated into the linguistic condition. However, constructivists have to admit that the playing field of language changes from time to time and that language evolves in the course of time. These changes are made possible only by the internal organization of the regime of the language concerned. Novelty thus exists because of drift, not because of fractures or extraterrestrial influence. Whenever something happens that hardly anyone had imagined before, it becomes clear that we are embedded within a certain hermeneutic horizon and the hermeneutic limits render the introduction of anything truly new a work of god or other thoroughly alien (extraterrestrial) powers. Trauma and miracle are thus of the same origin and they are founded upon our own blind spots.

Lacan rewrites Descartes' phrase 'Cogito ergo sum' in various ways, such as "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think" (Lacan, 1977, 166) and believed that the equation ego=subject had actually no *raison d'être*. The very meaning of Lacan's proposition is that there is no such thing as a self-identity. The identity of something, as I have tried to point out using the examples of Jason Bourne and Madeleine McCann, is always split. Instead of a singularity or oneness, there is always a 'too much' of something, an indivisible remainder, a leftover (surplus), which can also be subtracted. Likewise the meaning of a word, or of a single image can never be found in the word or the image itself, but only in a structure that embeds the aforementioned word or image in a narrative: meaning can therefore never be found in a single image or a single word. The single image or the single word are naked and either one can take on a thousand identities.

Just as the ego is under constant siege, threatened in its existence, squeezed between the demanding and intimidating super-ego that represents the law or an imposed and internalized morality on the one side and the chaotic and emotional id, our drives, the part of us that makes us say: 'I couldn't help it!' on the other side. The super-

ego is designed to control the id and from its perspective every expression of the id must be seen as a symptom of some unruly, uncivilized state that we must repress and overcome. If we were to merge completely with the symbolic order, that would make us a robot or a uniform wearing, properly dehumanized object, which has to see a doctor whenever it is sad or angry. Consequently, we must conclude that any emotion that is perceived as a symptom of a confused, psychotic reality, where nothing makes sense, is ultimately an expression of our humanity. It is what Nietzsche described as our all too human side; it is the human trait that runs contrary to functionality and smooth adjustment into technocratic or bureaucratic structures and systems. If the human psyche would be reduced to the super-ego and the id, and the ego would not be admitted and cultivated, but brutally repressed, the result would be mostly outbursts of silliness or else, of extreme violence, perpetuated by people who function seemingly well in authoritarian structures (e.g. military), but eventually go on rampages.

Apart from that, the constructivist orientation of thinking makes it impossible to see how a universal orientation of this thinking would look like - for the simple reason that the multitude of different linguistic horizons provide no transcendental concept, which allows to decide in favor of one or the other reading, a circumstance that the following example illuminates: when walking across a flea market, we often get a glimpse of the remainders of a person's life: cupboards, drawers, boxes and storage bins were opened and private, everyday objects are strewn about, turned into something public in preparation for the sale. Personal histories related to each item are available to be re-examined. Each object could carry a meaning but only if we are willing to attribute it to that very object. If not, there will be the eclipse of meaning and the object turns into useless junk. The deceased would have probably been able to tell a story about each object, when and where he bought it, how much his wife had liked it how lovingly she had maintained it, how much it was an expression of their marriage, etc.

These personal stories make up the value of each object, but now, without a narrative context, the value of the object, especially its commercial value falls back to the object's use value, and this value can be very low. However, each object could have a meaning, and it can happen that suddenly a customer arrives at the flea market, who, enthusiastically, takes an object in his hands, and raves about it because he knows that it is incredibly valuable, that it is a piece that was missing for a long time in a collection,

and because he knows for sure that the collector is willing to pay any price for this object. The bystanders at the flea market are perplexed and wonder what could be so special about this piece, and they fret about the fact that they themselves did not have the knowledge, that this customer obviously has, and that will make him rich. For everyone else, the object simply had no added value, and certainly, this added value could not be deduced from the object itself - its added value stems solely from the fact that it is an important, yet missing part of a collection. It could even be that the deceased owner knew nothing about the special added value, because for him, the only added value resided in the fact that his wife gave it to him on his 50th birthday. For everyone else, not even this specific attribute had been present, the meaning of the object was eclipsed and it became a piece of useless junk, in other words, it was naked.

### 5.3. The demise of symbolic efficiency

Symbolic efficiency refers to the way in which for a fact to become true it is not enough for us just to know it, we need to know that the fact is also known by the big Other. The big Other confers an identity (and a value) upon the many decentered personalities of the contemporary subject. In Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, the big Other takes the guise of some pantomime tennis players, who play tennis without rackets and without a ball, which is to say, by agreeing to play tennis without using the game's physical equipment, they project, they confer an identity upon a nonexistent tennis ball, and by extension, upon Thomas, who becomes, after hesitating for a brief moment, a player of their game: he throws the nonexistent ball back into the tennis court. The film foreshadows at this point the new paradigm of virtuality: symbolic efficiency is based on the ability to extend the playing field (the structure); connectivity and the swarm accomplish this extension; we are sentenced to continually develop our identity in an unlimited field, finding only fleeting stop-over identities in the midst of perpetual structural ambiguity. Today we see frequently when five year-old children play tennis without a ball or when they play war without bullets - at their play-stations. Through synchronized transmissions, they temporarily connect to a platform, which confers identity. The non-place of the hereafter is, in these cases, replaced by the non-place of real-time.

If symbolic efficiency consists in adapting different aspects of my personality to different realities in social and economic life then it follows that these different aspects cannot claim the same symbolic status; it is simply not possible to be, at the same time, big and small or black and white. However, postmodernism is precisely the age in which this is being promoted. Digitalization, as a prerequisite of postmodernity, also means, that the identity of the subject can no longer be considered analog quality; it is rather a discontinuous, discrete quality. This paradigm shift causes that there exists scale without its previously associated dimensions - mass, duration, physical presence - which means that the dimension that once had been referred to as the hereafter, is now interpreted as real time. Our natural desire to develop an identity has become someone else's capital stock; we are the motor and the raw material to make profits for the owners of our digitized identity containers - the social media networks and the resellers of touch screen devices, which are the showroom floors for our identities. In the symbolic realm of neo-liberal capitalism, there's a generalized permissiveness, which reaches its limits as soon as there is an interference of the Real. Political parties in a democratic society can represent every point of view, but they cannot have any anti-capitalist intentions in their program, in this case they would be banned from the playing field of democracy. It follows that the conditions for competition in a democracy are dictated by an authoritarian power. In a democracy to be undemocratic is not permitted. Accordingly, the democratic regimes claim that democracy is the best form of government, and that all other regimes have to be inferior, pathological or even terrorist. This is why democracies are entitled to bring democracy to other, undemocratic regimes, either through gentle pressure to become more democratic, or by violent enforcement, then peacekeeping armies are deployed to help those states with a modernization deficit.

Pre-modern structures had the big Other (usually, some kind of God) and a collective religion to which all individually subscribed. Modernity then declared that 'God is dead', and all knew that the emperor is naked (in the Real) but nonetheless all accepted the delusion that he is wearing new clothes (in the Symbolic), which is exactly what the final scene in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* expresses: Thomas agrees to play tennis without a ball:

In what then, does the postmodernist break consist? Let's begin with Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, perhaps the last great modernist film. As the hero develops photographs shot in a park, his attention is attracted to a stain that appears on the edge of one of the photographs. When he enlarges the detail, he discovers the contours of a body there. Though it is the middle of the night, he rushes to the park and indeed finds the body. But on returning to the scene of the crime the next day, he finds that the body has disappeared without leaving a trace. The first thing to note here is that the body is, according to the code of the detective novel, the object of desire *par excellence*, the cause that starts the interpretive desire of the detective (and the reader): How did it happen? Who did it? The key to the film is only given to us, however, in the final scene. The hero, resigned to the cul-de-sac in which the investigation has ended, takes a walk near a tennis court where a group of people – without a tennis ball – mime a game of tennis. In the frame of this supposed game, the imagined ball is hit out of bounds and lands near the hero. He hesitates a moment and then accepts the game: bending over, he makes a gesture of picking up the ball and throwing it back into the court. The scene has, of course, a metaphorical function in relation to the rest of the film. It indicates the hero's consenting to the fact that "the game works without an object": even as the mimed tennis game can be played without a ball, so his own adventure proceeds without a body. (Žižek, 1992: 143)

However, when the big Other no longer exists, it means that in the new era of reflexivity it is no longer relevant if we believe that the emperor is wearing clothes or not. It is no longer the point if we conform and agree to play tennis without a ball. We can still believe the testimony of our eyes (the Emperor's nakedness in the Real) rather than the words of the big Other (his Symbolic new clothes), but what if nobody else does? The actual, and indeed unsettling condition of postmodernism, is that instead of treating these cases as scandalous hypocrisies, we have to face the fact that we got more than we have asked for: the very community which we were part of, has disintegrated. The ground, on which we could have argued that one condition is authentic and the other is not, has shifted to the point where society sanctions limitlessness for personal identity. Traditional factors of stability like family, religion, etc. are progressively outmoded by the technologically enhanced pursuit of novelty, which had already been the driving force in the times of mass media. The experience of novelty is the low hanging fruit ever eluding our grasp in the tantalizing circuit of 'communicative capitalism'. It could even be that, in the future, we will no longer be able to conform or commit to anything, even if we wanted to. The demise of symbolic efficiency demonstrates, more than anything, our own nakedness.

## Summary Part I

The first part has sought to explain what makes a place a place, and further to investigate the role of places with respect to human identity. A place has always at least five dimensions: The three spatial dimensions, further the temporal, and finally a symbolic dimension. This symbolic dimension is a kind of layer of interpretation of the world and this layer has been created by language and communication, which is, by default, what makes the culture of humanity. A change in the ways we communicate always has repercussions in a culture, and concepts of place must be measured according to these new forms of communication. The real and the symbolic dimensions of life are intertwined in many ways. Mimesis is but one theoretical concept that seeks to look into this relationship.

Especially when we look at the concept of location (which should not be confused with the concept of place), it becomes clear that there are topological qualities in all symbolic structures, which run parallel to geographical and psychological structures, such as in memory (locating is remembering). That said, by cognitive basics and our common sense perception, we take it for granted that these topologies run parallel and behave in congruent and consistent manners. But in fact, there are phase shifts (like different time zones) and inconsistencies, whenever the signifier is emptied out, when designations lose their clear boundaries, and spaces become, in the age of digital communications, disembodied, in other words purely spectral or transactional.

The director Roberto Rossellini made his films at a time when there was only analog technology available. Back then it was at least presumed that there existed a reference to an original, which could be represented in more or less accurate ways. This is not to say that there haven't been deceptive practices in the times of analog technology. In the very example of *Substitute Location*, one can find a mode of perception at a tipping point, before computer generated images rendered the dichotomy true/false obsolete. Digital technology, however, generates free-floating matrixes that tend to place objects into their structures; it administrates, projects, imposes and confers identity. Here, it is important to examine the concepts of structuralism and diegesis. The question arises, whether or not the image of a location thus already represents a substitute for the real place it depicts (for the signifier is by nature a symbol of an

absence) - or does it rather create a new place (space/room) in a different sphere? What happens if technically generated images create a new level of perception, which in turn operates in competition with an immediate, not mediated perception?

## **PART II: MEDIATED SPACES AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR REAL-WORLD PLACES**

### **Chapter Six: Drawing lines – Locations and their moral implications**

#### **6.1. *Dogville* (Lars von Trier, 2003)**



Figure 14: Film still from *Dogville* (Lars von Trier, 2003)

Lars von Trier's film *Dogville* (Fig. 14) tells the story of Grace Mulligan, who arrives in the small mountain town of Dogville, Colorado, where she seeks to hide from gangsters. The inhabitants of Dogville allow her to stay and provide refuge in return for physical labor. Mulligan is caught in a dilemma because she needs to be accepted by every single one of the townspeople: with any attempt by her to reject a work or to put a limit on her services, she puts herself in danger to return into the arms of the criminals. Although she has only limited power, her stay in Dogville ultimately changes the social construct of the town and the lives of the local people. Again, this is a plot in the



tradition of the ancient Greek deity Dionysus, who comes as a stranger to a place, to bring disorder but also the opportunity for a restructuring. However, in this chapter I would like to take a closer look at the set design and how it could serve to understand the concept of media space.

The setting of *Dogville* is a theatre stage with a minimalist design. There are a few props, like furniture placed on the stage, but the major part of the scenery exists merely as geometrical outlines, painted in white on a black floor. Some elements have big text labels on them; for example, the outlines of a church have the text ‘House of Jeremiah’ written next to them. By drawing lines on a stage, Lars von Trier shows that it doesn’t take much more than these lines to establish a whole universe of power relations and the parable reveals the impact that the arrival of a stranger can have on a closed community. While this form of stage design is not uncommon in small studio theaters, it has rarely been attempted on film. Not only does the minimalist staging show the audience the film's artificiality, it also hints at its structure; a stark contrast to the desire to achieve greater realism by filming on location. Usually, a screenplay would determine the location where a scene is set, and most mainstream films go great lengths to find the most authentic location to render the narrative plausible. Lars von Trier claimed that by substituting a real location with this abstract model, he wanted to say that his story is not confined to any particular place or culture but could happen anywhere, which also means that, in principle, every location could be reduced to a geometrical model. Furthermore, a position can never be expressed as an absolute value, since all locations must be understood relative to a reference point.

Perhaps the most extreme example of this would be Lacan’s example of the two identical doors named ‘Ladies’ and ‘Gentleman’ in his article “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious”, where it is not the object that introduces the difference into the language (as the doors are identical), but the signifier that introduces the difference into existence. (Bryant, 2006)

The Prime Meridian is a line that runs through Greenwich, London, England. The decision to locate the Prime Meridian (a signifier that functions like a geographical primal scream) in London was totally arbitrary, but it had, nonetheless, a huge impact on our perception of the world, because London, as the capital of the British Empire, in the course of this decision came to be viewed increasingly as the center of the world.

The still widespread Eurocentrism was born with the decision to anchor the Prime Meridian in Greenwich, London. The terms East and West, with all their cultural connotations would be unthinkable without this decision.

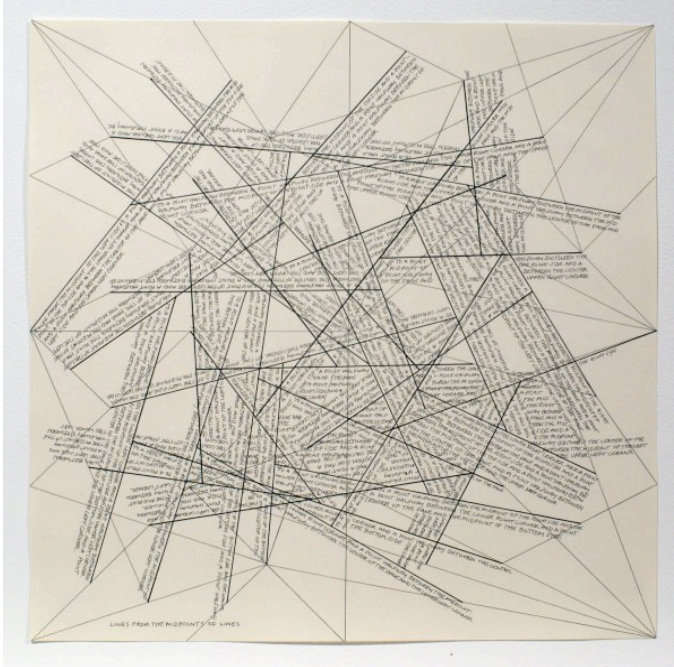


Figure 15: *The Location of Lines. Lines from the Midpoints of Lines.* (Sol LeWitt, 1975)

The artist Solomon LeWitt (1928-2007) has produced a series of drawings titled *Locations* (Fig.15), and he himself observed that each person would draw a line differently just like every person understands words differently. The fluctuations that occur when a draughtsman draws a line, depending whether he puts more pressure on the chalk or executes it with a higher speed; the intensity and the width of the line, the abruptness with which lines end and the security with which they meet - all of these factors will always depend on who does the drawing. LeWitt further observed that “neither lines nor words are ideas; they are the means with which ideas are expressed.” (LeWitt, 1971) This sentence already anticipates what I want to show in my investigation: The medium allows the expression of an idea, but at the same time it already is the distortion of the idea. However, the idea of an ideal world, in contrast to a life world only became plausible with the extraction of geometric patterns. Paul Virilio describes this in *L 'insécurité du territoire*.

And, in effect, our civilization begins at the moment where the Greeks exhumed geometry from their ethnological field, where they tear it from social practice in distinguishing the properties of forms of dimensions from their representations. They did not invent geometry, but the ecological utopia, in making it independent of the places and times of societies, they made of geometry a power in itself, that which these societies would have to imagine for themselves in recreating with their relations to space their relations to nature, and it is this type of liberating conviction that animates all ancient thought right up to their impossible mathematics. (Virilio, 1993: 118)

Sol LeWitt has often challenged a draftsman or, generally, an executer, to implement his work into a real space, be it a gallery or a museum. This challenge to implement, or to practice utopia, is one of the reasons why his work seems fresh and never outdated. His work is designed from the very outset to be actualized. LeWitt provided the itinerary, the executer has to deliver and complete the trajectory. In the same sense, the works of Plato or Kant, Hegel or Karl Marx, Euclid, Newton or Einstein, have contributed ideas independent of time and place, thus constituting something universal, but immaterial - and the implementers, like Fidel Castro or Lenin (implementers of Marx's philosophy) are always measured within their time and place in History. Marx (1818-1883) himself was very cautious about this distinction and did not want to be confused with those who came to act upon his theories. He declared: I'm not a Marxist! This means that 'Real Existing Socialism' should not be confused with Marx' original thinking.

However, the knowledge of geometry always meant, in the practical lifeworld, a strategic advantage: world civilization is a large and extremely complex self-developing system, which comprises other systems of varying degrees of complexity. It is the primordial function of geometry to reduce complexity. Geometry brought about the visual templates that could express complexity better than the fine arts. Flowcharts or diagrams, maps and fractals came into being and nobody would dare to consider them art. The first stone-tool known to mankind was the hand axe, also known as 'biface', and it took on the form of a triangle, and subsequently, of an arrowhead or a sword, tools that brought great advantages to the act of killing, be it animals or humans. The pyramids were fundamentally conceived and constructed as triangle structures that provided stability and flexibility in a very practical sense. The Romans built their entire empire through grids, crosses, squares and arcs, the Roman state expressed itself through a very systematic, one could even say, geometric language: Latin. The Romans

used geometrical strategies in military formations, road systems, tolls, taxes, aqueducts, etc. The Roman Empire is the earliest triumph of geometric reductionism, and all state power and its subsequent successful variations, such as imperialism, colonialism and financial market capitalism rely heavily on geometric reductionism, as they shift the perspective from the morally ambiguous, unique and complex individual to the crowd, that can be measured and treated in physical and mathematical terms. Hierarchies and command chains proved very efficient and successful during wartime, so military logic would also be employed in civil life. Uniforms basically communicate that the wearer of the uniform is a metabolic body deprived of his own will and ethics. The uniform not only signals the wearer's specific location in the command chain, but also frees him from any individual responsibility. The major advantages that the application of geometric principles in weapons technology and hierarchical organizations brought forth, resulted at the same time in a certain loss of compassion. A certain cruelty and social coldness was perceived especially by those who felt that they were treated like mere numbers or exchangeable 'human resources', not like human beings.

In the case of *Dogville*, the geometric reduction of the set produces also the effect that the people involved are likely doomed to be perceived not as individuals but as exchangeable models. Lars von Trier went on to claim that by employing this device, he wanted to make create a certain degree of universality in the perception of the film. Perhaps the film is also inspired by a comment that Guy Debord made on behalf of Marshall McLuhans' enthusiastic vision of the global village:

The Sage of Toronto pent several decades marveling at the numerous freedoms created by a 'global village' instantly and effortlessly accessible to all. Villages, unlike towns, have always been ruled by conformism, isolation, petty surveillance, boredom and repetitive malicious gossip about the same families. Which is a precise enough description of the global spectacle's present vulgarity. (Debord, 1988: chapter XII)

However, when watching *Dogville*, something strange happens: as most films already try to convey universal narratives and messages while being realistic, von Trier's claim is not as innocent as it may seem. The twist he employs renders the film even more specific and the spectator constantly tries to imagine a typical petty small town, be it located in America, Sweden or elsewhere. Does not universality precisely mean, that we, as observers do not all see the same small town, but that we rather see

our own, personal well-familiar small town? The same goes for a film about a father and a son. What we see, when we see a specific plot about the conflicts between a father and his son, are our own personal conflicts as fathers or as sons. This is a reminder of the notion that if someone utters the word ‘elephant’, the elephant appears in the room (at least our version of it), much more so than if it were the real animal: a complex, four-legged creature with a trunk and completely beyond comprehension, simply too real. Albert Einstein, in his *Principles of Research*, expressed this eloquently:

Man tries to make for himself in the fashion that suits him best a simplified and intelligible picture of the world; he then tries to some extent to substitute this cosmos of his for the world of experience, and thus to overcome it. This is what the painter, the poet, the speculative philosopher, and the natural scientists do, each in his own fashion. (Einstein, 1918)

In a first reading, *Dogville*'s bare staging serves to focus the audience's attention on acting and storytelling. The lines on the stage make the setting look like a map, but in this case, the map is inhabited by real people. In the tradition of Bertold Brecht's theatre, the instruments of theater are exposed and it is shown how manipulative they can be. The map functions here as an exaggerated gesture, which is complementary to the social gesture and could be “used to expose unjust social power relationships so the audience sees these relationships in a new way.” (Mitchell / Boyd, 2012: 211) The drawings of lines on the ground signal the setting of limits, and these limits define a territory or a property. The process behind this act is called enclosure.

## 6.2. Enclosure

Enclosure started in the seventeenth century as a process of combining a number of small landholdings to create larger farms. Once enclosed, the use of the land became the sole privilege of the owner; hence the land was no longer available for communal use. Enclosure could be accomplished by purchasing the property rights and all common rights to secure the exclusive rights of use, which in turn increased the productivity of the land and made it more valuable - or by passing legal regulations causing or forcing enclosure. Historians argue that rich landowners used their prerogatives and their proximity to government and state processes to seize public land for their private benefit: an early version of what today is called ‘privatization’.

Enclosure remains among the most controversial processes in agricultural and economic History, since it was sometimes accompanied by the use of force, resistance, and bloodshed. In the course of the industrial revolution, enclosure also created a landless class that could then serve as the work force required in the new developing industries at the time. Karl Marx argued in *Capital, Vol. I: A Critique of Political Economy* that

Enclosure played a constitutive role in the revolutionary transformation of feudalism into capitalism, both by transforming land from a means of subsistence into a means to realize profit on commodity markets (primarily wool in the English case), and by creating the conditions for the modern labor market by transforming small peasant proprietors and serfs into agricultural wage-laborers, whose opportunities to exit the market declined as the common lands were enclosed. (Marx, 1990: Ch.27)

Whenever a piece of land is enclosed, it gets an outline, a form; common ground becomes a privately owned resource, a measurable unit. An estate, on a smaller scale, a country or nation on a larger scale. Even animals have their methods for marking and defending territory. The issue is related to the habitat and the related questions concern power, access to resources, and ownership. Only well-defined units or areas can be located at all, only these areas can be identified on a larger map. This requires clear demarcations. Often, a border or a fence illustrates a claim, the claim on the resources are associated with the demarcation of the border. The map is the abstraction (reduction) of the territory. It helps to reduce ambiguity and complexity, it provides orientation, but it also solidifies property, claims to power and prerogatives. In many ways, a landscape painting or drawing is also equivalent to a map, yet it doesn't necessarily show the property in an abstract form. In this context, it is interesting to note that a photograph of a territory, taken from a large distance (e.g. a satellite image) is not an abstraction in the strict sense, because it is still figurative. In principle, it contains every detail of the territory. At a certain distance, the whole sphere of planet earth comes into sight and with this point of view – a blue globe spinning in a pitch-black space - the questions of nationality, ownership and discrimination grow into a new dimension and many of them are rendered absurd. It is therefore clear, that the proper function of a map is to provide ideological interpretations and claims for a complex and ambiguous body that serves as common ground for all its inhabitants alike.

If we return to the concept of enclosure as a mostly violent act of claiming and acquiring genuine real world territory, what would then, in parallel, be an act of enclosure in the semiosphere, the world made up of signs? A photographer wins ownership rights over an image by producing a picture, in which he documents a certain place at a specific moment in time. Here it is interesting to distinguish the motif of place, or landscape, from a portrait, because the image rights for the portrait are not necessarily always on the side of the photographer, while, in the case of a landscape, the legal rights of the photographer are hardly questioned. The photographer affirms his perspective and his interpretation of an environment and creates an image of reality in the very moment, in which he has given this reality its visual shape (border, frame, angle, etc.). The act of taking a picture does, hence, to a place in the semiosphere, what enclosure does to a territory in the real world. It is only a short step from the creation of a map to its instrumentalization, because each map is, at the same time, a manifestation and a prerogative.

A current example for the instrumentalization of maps (and images) would be Google, the company that offers a free digital topographic maps service called Google maps in which the feature street view is integrated, a continuous photographic representation of all of a city's roads destined for car traffic. This is a new type of enclosure in the semiosphere, which operates, among other cities, in the streets of Lisbon. In a predominantly public realm, a territory not privately owned, a vehicle of the private company Google drives around to photograph all the city's streets, and, as a side effect, it photographs all the buildings, regardless if they are publicly or privately owned, and all the people, who happen to be on the street at the time.

All these elements alike become part of Google's street view. The goal of Google is to organize the world's information, but what they are doing is actually more than organization, it is mediation, and thus a new form of enclosure, which takes place in the semiosphere. Google uses the photos in its own value chain, the images are the property of the company, Google takes care to protect these photos, so there can be no doubt in relation to property rights. Google applies its own watermark. The photos are a source of income for the company as a digitized form of information. This leads to the question of whether mediation must be seen as an instrument to claim not only economic but also political power.

The notion of mediatization represents a modern practice, that perpetuates in the semiosphere, what enclosure and colonization have done hundreds of years ago, and what explains why the first people on the moon have put up an American flag on the moon, a seemingly important symbolic ritual. Also, the use of the term ‘domain’ is instructive here. A domain is not only a term for a property, a territory and its owners, but it has come to be a designation for a place in the internet, a digital property which is located in an area that consists in its totality of electronic impulses, connections, a term for a privately or publicly owned, digital site.

### 6.3. Mediatization is enclosure

The original meaning of mediatization is to incorporate an occupied state into an occupying state as a means of the submission of one order into another, parent order. It was used in the nineteenth century in Germany, as the States of the *Holy Roman Empire of Germany* were mediatized by Napoleon V (1862-1926). What Napoleon did upon his military occupation of Germany, was in fact establishing an authority on an intermediate level between the local authorities and the independent cities of Germany, which were governed by local rulers and archbishops. Before Napoleon, these local authorities only had to report directly to the German Emperor, but now they had to obey a new, mid-level authority established by Napoleon. The local rulers of the occupied nation were allowed to keep their sovereign titles and often a measure of local power. Through mediatization, an established infrastructure stays unchanged and intact, but it now works for a different authority with different goals. Juergen Habermas (b.1929) explains mediatization:

An increasingly rationalized but complex lifeworld is both decoupled and at the same time dependent upon formally-organized layers of administration, be it economic or governmental administration. This dependence arises from the mediatization of the lifeworld, which is characterized by systemic ideals and targets or constraints. (Habermas, 1989: 305)

The advent of the Internet and the spread of mobile communication devices rendered a traditional dualism obsolete, where there was only mass media on the one hand or interpersonal forms of communication on the other. New interactive, networked forms of communication have a powerful effect and influence many areas of modern



life, and these new forms of communication require a redefinition of traditional spatial and temporal relationships. The claim that today everything is mediatized, describes a historically significant transmutation. So we perhaps one has to ask first, whether there has been a form of mediatization even before the advent of the Internet, and possibly even before the invention of photography and cinema. If it is because true we must abandon a definition of space, the mass media has established a in paradigmatic way, and which has shaped our perception of space, as well as our common sense, in favor of a concept of space where everything is perceived in pre -configured patterns, then we have to assume as a consequence that all influential institutions in society have changed or are newly constituted, in a continuous process of digitization and networking. In the network society not only the large traditional mass media loses its relevance but also the traditional political institutions lose their ground.

Media are important because they enable communication. At the same time, the medium determines the kind of communication from the outset and establishes the balance of power that will shape the communications. In this respect, media, as 'extensions of man' are like weapons, and depending on the situation, these weapons will prove effective and superior to other weapons, or on the contrary, inferior and ineffective. The question that repeatedly arises is: who controls the media? Is it global corporations or the state or the government? While the general public appreciates the fact that now there are more options available to communicate than just a face-to-face conversation, or a written letter, the eerie feeling takes hold, that everything we do online, can be traced and surveyed at all times and could be, at some point hold against us. We observe critically, how any media communication is shaped by the relentless logic of global capitalism: more commoditization, standardization, privatization, cooptation, monitoring and consumption.

#### 6.4. Common ground

Whenever a power loses its prerogative of definition and interpretation about whether and what kind of common ground a society should be granted, it spins out of control. All common ground, a prerequisite of solidarity and cohesion, becomes a matter of instrumental currents and cultural codes that are embedded in networks. The

downright intrusive omnipresence of the media seems to make it impossible to think an experience outside of the media. Mediatization is a procedure that is informed and determined largely through technology: while the emergence of new media and the rehabilitation of old media do not eliminate face-to-face communication, any non-mediated (immediate) interpersonal communication is, however, no longer what it was before. An example of the increasingly ubiquitous mediatization comes from the field of travel planning: for a traveler today, it is seemingly impossible to explore a foreign city or a foreign country without prejudice. A predetermined itinerary determines the perception of tourists in the same way as a mugshot, which is used by the police as technical means for identification determines the perception of the viewer of the mugshot: Since the depicted person is already seen through the eyes of criminal investigators, the person is perceived as a criminal, although this might not be the case.

In the same way tourists see only what the travel guide considers worth seeing. Media functions in this sense always as a kind of super-ego machine that constantly prefigures, what we should see, hear, feel, and think. However, media does not interpose itself between the viewer and some form of reality, to overcome the limits of space and time, but it does so by synchronizing with a particular symbolic coordinate system to ensure that we are all on the same page - just like children in school. The coordinate system of the symbolic dimension - the fifth dimension adding to three spatial and one temporal dimension, thus constructs the 'other'. The big Other (the clergy and political leaders, who communicated through mass media) is now much smaller, since the information bomb exploded.

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) argued that the media were 'extensions of man' (McLuhan, 1964: 7); interestingly he said this at the time of mass media, when only a very small part of the population could actively use media and shape it. The majority was passively receiving messages; they were at the mercy of the media. Today, everyone can run his own media channels, at least theoretically, in the social networks. However, it is probably more adequate to state, that we as humans, become media extensions. In this scenario, our physical bodies are obsolete, they are a excess remainder in a fully transcendent media environment, since they need rest, sleep, food and sex and cannot compete with machines and their 24/7 rhythm. Paul Virilio (b.1932) has argued that this other, novel symbolic dimension functions in real-time, "the

instantaneity of the interactive telecommunications of cybernetics.” (Virilio, 2010: 70) Ironically, this dimension only emerges by way of our changing perception. This dimension is infinitely small and without duration. It is an instant in the immediate now, and thus a space without expansion, uninhabitable for humans as physical beings. The contemporary problems of multitasking and burnout are symptoms of a dilemma that is inscribed in human nature: the human condition is linear at its core and cannot be synchronized with various systems simultaneously. It is simply impossible to move at different speeds at the same time.

It seems that not only for Virilio, real life occupies a certain position of primacy in relation to ideal, abstract systems and orders, not because of its complexity, but based on the assumption that there is a common dimension to life and all people should have equal rights of accessing this dimension. Commons refers to the cultural and natural resources of a society, which is equally available for all members of this society, including the natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable earth. The term ‘common ground’ means that these resources belong to everyone and should not be kept owned privately. If a resource, such as real estate, which is owned by the community, is converted into private property, this procedure is called either ‘enclosure’ or ‘privatization’. Enclosure is, as it were, an act of discrimination and, at the same time, appropriation and identification. Who has the right to perform such an act? This is usually a political question, and power is based on violence, especially when a war has been fought to conquer a territory and to occupy it. In the world of animals, there is always a fight for territories: that means, that identifying and defending one’s ground is already a biological, evolutionary phenomenon, which is related to survival. The Book of Genesis begins with an act of discrimination. A line is drawn. A horizon separates the heavens and earth. A mark indicates a location whenever a vertical line intersects the horizon. It is therefore questionable whether there ever has ever been a single geometric turn or if geometry was not always already an integral part of the life world. That is, the turn to science and technology and their dominance have both ontological and ontic implications; they are characteristic of the progress of the people. Whenever a conscious being discovers the possibility to make use of geometry, it will use it: be it to overcome the idea of the commons or to foster the reintroduction of the commons. At the core of the claim that everything is always already mediatized is the argument that there can be

no pure experience outside of mediation. Language is mediation in its purest form, and radical resistance is only possible, if one refuses to communicate. Only through language, people gain understanding of the world and of themselves. Meaning exists in language, or in new, technological media only when people can function as transmitters and receivers with the same codes and channels. Media enables co-ordinated (synchronized) human action and requires it. At the same time, people understand the world, and their position in it through the media. Today, media is an integral and pervasive phenomenon between all stakeholders in society, and media has annexed a considerable part of the power that crucial institutions of society, such as governments, schools, church, family yielded until mediatization began its process of subordination of these formerly almighty institutions. History, including media History, confirms thus a transition from non-mediated perception to mediated perception, which also means that this perception is always already ideologically interpellated.

## Chapter Seven: Media space

### 7.1. *Father Duffy. Times Square, New York City* (Lee Friedlander, 1974)



Figure 16: *Father Duffy. Times Square, NYC* (Lee Friedlander, 1974)

For this chapter, I have chosen a still photograph instead of a film, because it captures the instrumental quest for attention to the political and consumerist spectacle that surrounds citizens. What is explicitly expressed in Lee Friedlander's (b.1934) photograph from 1974 titled *Father Duffy. Times Square, NYC* (Fig. 16) is the contemporary enclosure process of public space accomplished by media. While it might be efficient to build fences and walls around a territory in a society based on agriculture, enclosure in a consumerist society has to be accomplished in the mental environment of perception.

The very title of the photograph lets us assume, that the author's intention was to capture a picture of a monument, which was built in 1937 in the honor of Father Francis P. Duffy, the most highly decorated cleric in the History of the United States Army. But the photograph also shows that the monument is located on a major urban square in New York City, Times Square. A place like Times Square is usually filled with crowds of people who affirm that the notion of a central plaza or square is that of a public sphere - a place for mutually constitutive encounters, which are the very gestures of public life. The public sphere is defined by moments of shared humanity on neutral or common ground, where encounters happen without mediation, which means that human (face-to-face) encounters are deeply non-instrumental in the sociological but foundational in the ontological sense. Yet what we see on the photograph, are not encounters of physical human beings on a public square, but rather two ideological instruments (media), competing to capture the focus of the mind on a single object or thought. The one instrument is the monument from 1937 but it is surrounded, superseded and dwarfed by giant screens, billboards and outdoor advertising. Lee Friedlander, the author of the photograph, composed the picture in a particular way to show how the domination of contemporary advertising media makes it difficult to limit or clarify our receptivity, to narrow the range of complex stimuli, in order to be able to select our focus preferentially on the monument.

Urban encounters are more and more delegated to mass and social media, where fleeting contacts between strangers who momentarily occupy the same communicational space generate an administered and pre-figured encounter. The technologically controlled screen inverts and substitutes these moments, thus re-instrumentalizes them. They bring to the surface how clearly we depend on each other,

but the disembodiment of the screen runs counter to any reaffirmation of our humanity. The encounter in the mediated public sphere is not based on consent, but it is rather based on an instant, and this instant, as the photograph by Lee Friedlander makes clear, is defined by the social terrain, which is already demarcated by the power relations that exist between the dominant and the marginal languages of global culture. This means that we are presently propelled into an era of universal comparison, in which the destination is not given in advance, but is rather pulverized into countless, ever-changing projections.

These ever-changing media messages that are already contrasting with the stable, almost eternal aura of the 'Father Duffy' monument foreshadow the recent cultural shift that digital technology has brought about: it resides above all in semiotic categories such as representation and signification to explain the location of the self in relation to its media environment. Father Duffy stands for codes, patterns and rules that are today in increasingly short supply: values which serve as stable orientation points by which one could subsequently let oneself be guided. In this context it is crucial to distinguish new modes of neural mappings; mobile technology allows attaching a mirroring signifier to the self. It could be said that an enclosing fence, made out of mapping language, now accompanies the proceedings of the physical human body. The user can still move away from the stationary locations of billboards, but with a mobile screen attached to his body, he is doomed to develop more fluent and discontinuous states of the self. In a psychogeographical sense, with mobile technology, we don't move; we rather stand still, since our environment moves with us as we move. In geographical terms, in order to move, we have to get from one environment to another, different environment. Media space does not allow that we move actively from one environment to another. The term space corresponds to an organization of human experience, which is fundamentally shaped by the physicality of our body and its functionalities that relate to our natural environment (the surface of the earth, water, air). This experience is determined by gravity and our visual system operates as an interface, since it interprets our bodily experiences and influences how we see, perceive or map our environment. Blind people, who are unable to interpret the experience of space in visual terms, develop different ways of perception and mapping, which are

extremely effective and operational. This should remind us that the bodily experience always comes first and that visual perception is only one way of relating to a spatial environment.

The spatial coordinates to reference our visual interface are based on the fact that our eyes are located on one side of the body, which gives us a notion of front and back; the eyes usually operate 1.8m above the ground, which produces the notion that the open space before us extends to a horizon. Gravity makes things fall to the ground. We can pick them up and throw them in the air. This gives us the concept of up and down. With our arms and legs, we can reach into the space that we perceive visually as 'within reach'. While our arms enable some lateral movements, our legs basically propel us forward, and this motion over time produces the concept and the metaphor of progress, which we then apply to concrete activities and abstract thoughts. Thus, visual perception is at the same time the faculty that provides the mental self with an anchor in the bodily experience of space and the projection point for mapping schemes of virtual environments. This experience translates into the idea that space itself is an enabling medium for our activities and thoughts. Without space, none of this would be possible. We assume that our visual interface can indeed create this medium, which is space. This is, of course, an abstract concept of space; space mediated by screens, media space.

## 7.2. Mass media and Social media

A medium is a substance that transports waves. In normal usage, media are transmitters of messages. The message moves through the medium. The medium does not create the message and the medium is not the same as the message. The medium is what brings the message from the source (editors, television stations, radio stations, etc.) to different destinations. Similarly, a wave medium is the substance that carries a wave (in other words, a disturbance) from one place to another. Again, the medium is not the wave and it doesn't create the wave. It enables the transport of the wave from its source to other destinations. In the case of an ocean wave, the medium through which

the wave moves would be the seawater. When a sound wave moves from the church choir to the churchgoers, the medium is the air inside the church. If it is true, that the medium is not the same as the message, it is also true that can be no message without a medium. If something were being said in a vacuum, no one would be able to hear it because the carrier substance (air, in this case) is missing.

In pre-modern times, envoys on horseback were dispatched to deliver messages from one place (sender) to another (recipient). Then there were (and are) monuments and carvings in stone, finally paintings and books. The twentieth century was the century of mass media: the telephone allowed conversations while regardless of large spatial distances. Cinema and television as well as newspapers were produced by few and reached many - they were made for mass audiences. Human perception and the experience of space and time changed due to ongoing technological changes in communications and information. These changes also influenced heavily the modes of image production in the twentieth century. A second industrial revolution started with the advent of computer technologies, which allow to delegate not only physical strength on a steam-powered machine or a motor, but also immaterial and intellectual force. The analogy with the first industrial revolution seems obvious, because of the computer's capacity to process information. This capacity dwarfs human capabilities as well as a steam-powered locomotive dwarfs muscle strength and the stamina of a horse. Media, as a means for communication and diffusion of information, are, however, not an invention of the first or the second industrial revolution, media has always existed. But the technological revolutions brought about new forms of media, and each individual new medium is characterized by its unique properties, which determine from the outset the nature of communications and their impact. With the advent of the Internet, social media is undermining the impact of mass media; now, everyone, not just a few, is able to send and distribute information from one point to another, and as a side effect of this new paradigm, the social network establishes a new territory, an environment where everyone can potentially be both transmitter and receiver.

What emerges is a media space that requires no physical presence in one and the same physical location, a pre-requisite that was still valid in the time of face-to-face communication. The media space requires merely simultaneity, which means that the digital media space is constituted through a communications network, which operates



through synchronicity between transmitter and receiver. Thereby, the distinction private / public is rendered obsolete; the mere intention to send either a private or a public message, has no effect here. Everything is potentially viewable by everyone, if communications are inter-connected, and the term ‘mass’ is then no longer exclusively reserved for those, who decide to reach a mass audience. Hypothetically, it can apply to everyone in the network, if he should reach a certain number of recipients, on a permanent basis. At the same time, he who had the intention to reach a mass audience may miss this target.

### 7.3. The medium provides the substance that ideas lack

If we go back to the before mentioned statement by Solomon LeWitt that “neither lines are or words are ideas, but rather the means by which ideas are expressed,” (LeWitt, 1971) then we have to conclude that any idea also does not exist, if it has no medium that supplies it with a body that allows its expression. In the same way as a speaker gives a specific shape (expression) to a sound wave, so we give shape to our way of thinking by our language.

However, language not only shapes the idea, it transforms and distorts just this idea at the same time. To fully understand the nature of a wave, it is important to visualize the medium as a collection of particles in space, and between these particles, interaction takes place. In other words, the space can function as a medium, because the particles that make up space can interact with each other. The interaction of a particle of the medium with the next adjacent particles enables a pulse to travel through the medium. A wave can be interpreted as a disturbance that travels through a space, which would, without the disturbance, stay put in a balanced equilibrium. If a wave is present in a medium, that is, when a disturbance travels through space, the individual particles of space are only temporarily moved away from their original position. Likewise, when the wave has traveled through the medium, a force is exerted on the particles, which ensures that they return to their original position.

An idea must, per se, be expressed in a certain form, in a specific language, and with a unique perspective. The actual process that makes up the expression of an idea (a kind of intangible resource in the form of thoughts), involves, inevitably, a medium that

is made of particles, in other words, an abstract space with its own properties. This process of conceiving and expressing an idea can be linked to the process of image production – this in turn can be applied to the human visual interface as well as to a technical device to capture images.

My point is here to link this production of abstract space, media space, to the process of enclosure, to the creation of territorial boundaries. These procedures are substantially interrelated and they are critical for the formation of memory and identity. The crucial difference is that the formation of memory and identity in this abstract media space is disconnected from a physical body, which would be able to operate in a concrete, geographical space.

However, we must conclude that a wave describes only the movement of a pulse - it never describes the movement, in the sense of relocation, of matter. Whereas the particles of the medium vibrate at a fixed position, the pattern of the pulse is actually moving from one place to another place. This is why waves transport energy, and emotions are the human form of energy. A disturbance travels through the medium of, because one particle transmits the pulse to its neighboring particles, and so energy is transported from one end of the medium (transmitter) to another end (recipient). The energy was dislocated, or projected. In a wave phenomenon, energy flows from one place to another, but the particles, the matter of the medium, return to their fixed positions. A wave transports energy without transporting matter. In summary a wave can be called a disturbance, which travels through a medium, and it transports energy from one point (source) to another (destination) without transporting matter. Each individual particle of the medium will be temporarily relocated and then returns to its original equilibrium position.

Mass media function in the same manner: media presents in particular accidents and events that disturb the banalities of everyday life - banalities that are otherwise not worth mentioning. This is why these banalities disappear - they escape our attention. Marshall McLuhan said that media were the extension of man. I would argue that the human being has also become the extension of media, because man is not only the transmitter of media, but, perhaps even more so, the recipient of media. The media imposes its energy on the recipients; it determines its scale, size, pattern, speed, etc. The

media determines how the energy reaches the recipient. In this sense, the media always resembles a synchronization engine and it has the tendency and the aim to strive for full spectrum dominance of the recipient. The medium itself is the prerequisite for the transmission of ideas, force, power and energy, and when we talk about energy, we mean libidinal energy, emotions. The libido is a term used by in psychoanalytic theory to describe the energy created by the survival and the sexual instincts, better known as drives. According to Sigmund Freud, the libido is part of the id and is the driving force of all behavior. Desire is a more civilized form of the drive, but the libidinal investment behind it is the same. The term e-motion already hints at the connection between energy and movement. Media space is the designated space to transmit desires: it is the – technologically translated - space that is generated whenever two pairs of human eyes meet, when they make ‘eye contact’.

## **Chapter Eight: The screen-based medium**

### **8.1. *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983)**



Figure 17: Film still from *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983)

In the film *Videodrome* (Fig. 17) by David Cronenberg (b.1943), the director makes an attempt to show what a fascist propaganda machine would look like in 1983.

The film shows a TV program, where a pop culture analyst and philosopher named Brian O'Blivion is giving a lecture in which he is prophesying a future in which television supplants real life. To emphasize his vision of the future, O'Blivion never appears in person in the studio but instead only his image is broadcast into the studio from a remote location onto a monitor. The plot of the film is based on a government conspiracy that seeks to morally and ideologically purge America and inflict fatal brain tumors to 'lowlives': TV audiences fixated on extreme sex and violence. To achieve this, a man named Barry Convex, the head of the Spectacular Optical Corporation, an eyeglasses company that is in fact an unsuspecting extension of a NATO weapons manufacturer, has designed a TV channel called Videodrome, which has a programming of extreme sex and violence. Spectacular Optical has been secretly working with a man called Harlan (the name hints to the German Nazi Filmmaker Veit Harlan (1899-1964), who made the notorious film *Jud Suess* (1940), making the case that Jewish life is worthless and a threat to the body of the German people) to get Max, a TV executive and the protagonist of the film, exposed to Videodrome and to make sure it will be broadcast, as part of the conspiracy.

In *Videodrome*, director David Cronenberg shows a TV set with a screen that stretches into the living room literally pointing a gun at the spectator. Adorno saw the role of the artist in society like this: "Art is not a matter of pointing up alternatives but rather resisting, solely through artistic form, the course of the world, which continues to hold a pistol to the heads of human beings." (Adorno, 1974: 80)

In another scene from *Videodrome*, the TV screen functions like a 'breathing screen', an effect in which the televised lips of the character Nicki Brand are not flattened by the glass of which a TV screen is made, but rather the lips pucker and blow, making the screen, which is now a soft and flexible membrane, pulsate and pound back and forth from the console frame like a swelling breast. The same lips then invite Max with her seductive voice to push himself into her mouth, uttering: Don't keep me waiting. Cronenberg, by transforming the screen into a physical interface, accomplishes in *Videodrome* to reveal the functioning of the media as an ideologically threatening apparatus.

## 8.2. *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* , segment "Illibatezza – Chastity" (Roberto Rossellini, 1963)

When Lacan said “sure, the picture is in my eye, but I am also in the picture” (Lacan, 1979: 63), he referred to the fact that, as spectators, we are always embodied, non-transcendental subjects, creating a blind spot, which displays exactly in the moment when we claim to make a neutral, objective observation. Curiously, it was Roberto Rossellini again, who made a visual attempt to show this inconsistency. Entitled “Illibatezza – Chastity”, it is the first episode of the film *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* that Rossellini directed in 1963. Just as the film *Videodrome*, the episode deals with the interface, that means, the contact surface between image and spectator, a notion that can be applied to the camera, the filmstrip, the screen, and to what is not surprisingly called ‘touch screen’ in our contemporary high-tech universe. The story unfolds on an airplane, where the middle-aged American salesperson Joe feels attracted to Anna Maria, a young and beautiful but naive Italian flight attendant. During a stopover, he films her with a consumer movie camera and stalks after her like a child, craving affection. While he is pestering her relentlessly, a psychiatrist gives Anna Maria’s fiancé the advice that she should act more slutty because Joe is a psychopath fixated on Anna Maria’s purity. Anna Maria follows this advice and her sudden promiscuous manner and attire at a bar disappoint Joe so utterly, that he laments the loss of his dream girl and instead takes comfort in projecting her image, which he himself had filmed, onto the wall of his hotel room. Pathetically, he tries to kiss and hug the mirage, and in this very moment, Anna’s image glimmers on the back of his own body, darkening the projection in front of him (Fig. 18).



Figure 18: Film still from the segment "Illibatezza-Chastity" of the film *RoGoPaG* (Roberto Rossellini, 1962)

This slightly perverted version of a platonic love story substitutes a passive sexual object with an active one. Slavoj Žižek (b.1949) labels this a ‘tickling object’:

Therein resides the common definition of parallax: the shift of the objects’ position against a background, caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist is that the observed difference is not simply subjective, due to the fact that the same object, which exists out there, is seen from two different points of view. It is rather that subject and object are inherently "mediated," so that an epistemological shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an ontological shift in the object itself. (Žižek, 2006)

The segment "Illibatezza – Chastity" is a film in which Joe comes into physical contact with the interface of the medium, raising new questions about the touchable screen and tactile experience. In a different yet similar fashion, the segment "Illibatezza – Chastity" and the film *Videodrome* analyze a foundation of cinematic spectatorship. In both works, the focus shifts from eye to body, retina to skin, perception to sensation, vision to participation, and transcendence to embodiment. In "Illibatezza – Chastity", a film projection engages us with an interfaciality that is hardly limited to the common notion of self-reflexivity. This time cinema does not address the subject’s passive eye, but incites him to become an active body, complicating subjectivity, the embodied agency of interfaciality. Joe’s darkened room incarnates the movie theater as Plato’s cave, where his voyeurism enjoys the pleasure of turning the female body into a commodity, a fetish, which is, in this case of reverse pornography, not a sexual but virginal object that looks more real and pure than in reality. In other words, the suspension of disbelief works through the disavowal of the double knowledge that the projection is not only non-existent and but also no longer true. Joe’s reintegration of Anna Maria into his self-centered imaginary signification is a privilege of the transcendental subject, the secluded immobile spectator whose eye, however, identifies with the camera that can take any perspective unnoticed by the object. And in this sense, the theater-cave holds the screen as mirror, a mirror-screen that enables the subject’s euphoric self-identity only through his identification of the image-as-other as self. In Joe’s case, the screen reflects not the actual fact, but the false fantasy of Anna Maria’s purity, her sheer belonging to him, just as in the lost mother-child bind, on both the perceptual and psychological level. This classical account, however, presumes the

spectator's hyper-perceptive state, which is usually combined with an immobilized physical state.

But what if he stands up and tries to touch the projection? Paradoxical enough, this extreme approach to the screen puts in motion the Imaginary as the unconscious adhesion to the projection, reviving the paralyzed materiality of the body and the physical interface. However, this move from watching to touch cannot accomplish a real touch of the projected body because even a regained corporeality only contacts the apparatus, just like in Cronenberg's *Videodrome*. This act would be tantamount to trying to make physical love to a ghost. Max in *Videodrome* and Joe in "Illibatezza – Chastity" experience the apparatus in flesh and blood: a tactile disclosure of the material structure of our projections - the transcendental subject has usually no ideological permission to do just that. Joe's assimilation to the image becomes dissimulation when acting out turns into action just as the audience's crying in sad movies reawakens their being physically situated in a theater. Through his bodily contact with the bodiless image, Joe must learn that the projection of a virginal image is not something his desire can penetrate. He himself is now literally producing a blind spot through his body. Joe has to learn that his own projection is the guarantee that the projected object will be forever out of reach.

However, Joe does not remain a macho spectator, comparable to the common consumer of pornography, who dreams himself into the universe beyond the screen. Neither is he trying to theoretically decode the imaginary signifiers of an ideological apparatus. Simply by getting up from the sofa, Joe does not move toward the outside of his cave but rather into its heart, thereby revealing the mechanism of phantasmagoria. In this sense, he is the reversal of a common pornography user and he is a pervert because he cannot accept the fact that, once virginity is lost, it can't be regained, it is rather lost for all time. Rossellini is trying to show what can happen to an innocent gaze that is stubbornly insisting to stay innocent, that is refusing, on some level, to assume the trauma (or the miracle) of losing one's virginity of the gaze. Ultimately, the film's message is that pornography and chastity are two sides of the same medal.

But "Illibatezza – Chastity" is also about filmmaking and projections: Joe is the filmmaker who, as body-subject, does not stay immobilized, as the average TV

spectator would. Joe represents the filmmaker who, just as the photographer Thomas in *Blow-Up*, comes into physical contact with the interface of the medium, which he himself has produced in the first place – hence he is forced to recognize his own projections and his own blind spots.

### 8.3. The screen disembodies the place

Photographs that had to be developed first on negative film and then on photochemical paper have given way to digital images. The process is marked by a further de-materialization of the image, but also by an enormous increase in the proliferation of images. With an overall estimate of two billion screens worldwide, and additional millions of handheld devices, there is no doubt that the screen has become one of the most successful technical devices ever invented. What implications does it have, when the world is more and more perceived through a screen? Today, in conjunction with the computer, the screen is the primary means for accessing any type of information, be it in the form of texts, still images or moving images. Humans in the twenty-first century are constantly surrounded by screens and screening devices. Security cameras record all our movements in almost any public area. In the workplace, we constantly sit in front of a computer terminal and stare at screens, which display texts and images. At home we get to rest on the sofa, to look at more screens, to entertain us with TV shows, movies, and video games. We communicate with the help of touch screen mobile phones, we interact with ATM cash machines and registers, board computers in cars; in trains, airplanes, stores and gas stations, and we are confronted with video display terminals. In almost any environment, we interact with some sort of screening device, which functions as an interface for our experiences, as people who read, write, speak, hear, record, observe and think.

When Columbus aspired, around the year 1500, to sail to new continents, of which they did not know yet that they existed, there were no computer screens and very few people had glass windows in their homes. Although the Romans had already invented a type of glass, this glass was not as plane and transparent as we know it today. Only from the mid-16th century on, window glass had been in use more frequently. But even then, glass was still a luxury, only available for the rich. The mansions of the



upper classes only had glass windows in the main rooms; by the end of the century, the most beautiful town houses had glass in about half of their windows. For the aristocrats, who usually spent a number of months of the year in each of their various estates, window glass was a precious material; during their absence, the glass was removed from the windows and carefully stored away. The whole mindset at the time was very different from today. The majority of people were deeply religious. In this universe of faith, God was always present; he was everywhere, and he could see everything they saw and did. He could read even their minds and knew what they were thinking. People believed that they inhabited a spiritual, all-comprising sphere, which was defined and controlled by God; and although God seemed invisible most of the time, he showed up every now and then, through revelations. People felt that they were God's instruments, or that God could make them his medium, if he wanted to. God could speak through them. Humans based their decisions and actions on the will of God ('so help me God'). Painters like Dürer or composers like Bach sometimes wondered why God has chosen them and gave them their outstanding capabilities to create works of art. Music was most appropriate, not least because of its transcendent, immersive qualities, to manifest the ubiquitous presence of God. When the faithful churchgoers heard the majestic sound of an organ in a huge cathedral, it became compelling, that God himself must have composed this music with the help of a medium, the composer. When Columbus embarked to explore the vastness of the unknown ocean west of Europe, to discover a new continent, he believed that he had been chosen by God to do so, such as Dürer and Bach. And because he believed that he had a mission from God, he also believed that God would protect and guide him. He believed that there was a specific prophecy in the Bible predicted his journey. Most people at the time thought, however, that he was crazy to sail to the edge of the world and that he would fall into an abyss and never come back - to their knowledge, the world was flat.

The general attitude towards his ambitions was very skeptical, but those who financed his expeditions wanted to see evidence, should he actually manage to reach new shores. Columbus was then obliged to be able to show something that would prove his discovery. A few snapshots or a short video would have been sufficient at the time - but certainly not a simple written report or a drawing. That was too tricky then as it is now. A written text can spring entirely from imagination; it does not prove anything.

Unfortunately, photo- or videocameras were not at hand, so Columbus had to bring back several items, which had never been seen before by the people in old Europe. In the world before Columbus, there was no technology that would allow the capturing of images from the newly discovered continent; no airplane or satellite could take the bird's eye to chart the new territory. Columbus would eventually return with unknown plants such as potatoes or tobacco, he would bring back exotic animals or samples of the indigenous population of the new continent. After a while, it must have become clear that the new world had indeed many new things to offer, including dangerous diseases and epidemics. For the majority of people on the old continent, it was impossible to travel to the unknown territories in Africa and America; therefore they had to be content with botanical and zoological gardens, where plants and animals from overseas could be exposed to a wider audience that could not take the rigors of such a journey, out of fear, lack of money or other impediments. In some cases, it was also necessary to artificially reproduce the climatic conditions in the overseas colonies; that was achieved with greenhouses, glass houses or in aquariums and terrariums. The creation of these artificial parks made a new exotic world accessible to the public, albeit only in an exemplary way; in the case of the aquarium, the experience was reduced to its visual dimension. However, this new form of substitute experience also offered protection and convenience. The contingencies of an actual journey, the risks and dangers that direct contact with these exotic forms of life could bear, were eliminated. The process that changed places (sites) into sights was launched and the windowpanes of greenhouses and aquariums must be seen as precursors to today's screens. The process that later took the disembodiment of places to new levels, with the invention of photography, cinema, live TV and real-time video over IP, always catered to a sedentary audience that was eager to know about every new discovery in detail, but was not capable or willing to take the risks that are inscribed in these explorations. Accordingly, the first landing on the moon in 1969 was followed on live television by millions of TV watchers.

The screen is usually made of transparent glass or a material with similar properties. The screen of a computer display serves as an interface that connects us to other screens anywhere in the world in real-time via telecommunications. The screen lets us look from an inside to an outside, or from an outside to an inside, just as any

regular window, yet we cannot equate a window with a screen. However, windows and screens have some basic features in common. Most windows can be opened or closed, in other words, they can be controlled, and screens are used for control purposes. If outside a cold wind blows or there's snow or rainfall, we would rather keep the window closed. If the air is stuffy inside we can open the window for a while. If we look out the window and see a stranger entering our building, we are able to decide whether we want to open the door or whether we would rather pretend that we are not at home. Most windows cannot be opened from the outside. Transparent glass screens serve to protect us against all sorts of adverse weather conditions, especially while driving a car. We prefer the mosquitoes to die on the windshield and not after they crash onto our face. But screens are designed to not only protect, they are equally designed to attract us, to seduce us, as shown in the example of the storefront. The shop owner protects his goods from potential thieves, while, at the same time, he wants to win potential customers by showing his offerings in his shop window. If we could simply open a shop window from the street and take out all the valuable things that are on display, what would possibly be the benefit of this window?

Following the example of the shop window, it is tempting to assert that the existence of the transparent screen causes emotions; by causing emotions, the screen creates desires, and these desires take on concrete shapes, they focus on something. At the same time, the screen protects from unwanted side effects; it keeps all kinds of biological and chemical hazards at bay, it protects from viruses, disease triggers or simply prevents theft. Prostitutes in Amsterdam's red light district sit half-naked behind shop windows, attracting potential clients from the street. The client can choose a sexual service, just like a traditional customer would select a pretzel. If one of the women on display gets his attention, then the formula established by the advertising industry can follow through: attention, interest, desire and finally, action (AIDA). The point is that action means, in this formula, the act of purchase, of paying a price to acquire a service, to consume. It is the action that must be taken to overcome the barrier of the screen, and here lies the first fundamental characteristic of contemporary consumer culture: it is all designed to go beyond the screen, to fulfill a desire, to make a dream come true with a simple purchase. But, and this is the basic feature attached to any form of acting out, the client loses the protection of the screen: a residual risk shall be liable to the act of

consumption. A brothel client, who decides to buy the services of prostitutes can catch a sexual disease, cause a pregnancy or can be blackmailed, etc.

With the advent of electronic media, the screen has transformed the circle of AIDA into something entirely abortive. The decisive progress lies in the total elimination of risk, which is connected with the desire to go beyond the screen. Since the advent of video pornography and cybersex, these risks no longer exist, and the promise of immersive media is that of a total, yet entirely risk-free experience.

However, the film *Videodrome* points out that electronic media and the computer screen generate their own perils. Mass media cannot spread any viruses - but it can spread memes - and memes can be worse than any virus. As the example of the storefront shows, the advantage is always on the side of those who can open or close the window, who are in control, and hence, those who exercise power. The simple question that follows is: who is able to control the screens? Who can open and close the window at his will? And what is the price one has to pay to get to the other side? Is this price always to lose the protection of the screen, to lose its function as a protective shield?



Figure 19: Glovebox for handling hazardous material

If we look at the a closed, but transparent chambers with sealed-in gloves for handling hazardous material, which can be found in scientific laboratories around the world (Fig. 19), we find that the typical construction of these boxes includes two holes with integrated gloves that gives the operator access to the interior of the box, but at the same time hermetically shields him from the box's interior. The purpose of this system is obvious: handling and control of hazardous materials is possible, while maximum protection through transparent screens and elastic glove material is guaranteed. If we compare this instrument with the screen in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, where a handgun stretches through the elastic TV screen into a living room, then we must admit that, as TV spectators, we are rather located inside of the hazardous materials apparatus, while we might believe that we control the device, using a remote control. In fact, we are immobilized and held at gunpoint to focus our attention on the screen.

As before mentioned, the aquarium or terrarium tanks are precursors of the electronic screen. Many zoos have now replaced the prison-like cages and metal rods with transparent acrylic glass walls that allow zoo visitors a degree of physical proximity to potentially dangerous animals, which was previously unthinkable. With this measure, the operators of zoos want to make sure that a visit to the zoo is, as an experience, much closer to a nature film of the Discovery Channel, and less a reminiscence to a prison cell.

#### 8.4. The deceptive nature of screens

From time to time there are reports about children and adults, who somehow manage to get behind the transparent fence and walk into the animal cages in the zoo; apparently, to pet the cute panda bears or lions.

Of course there is no denying the appeal of a panda; they may be very simply the cutest beasts on the face of the planet. But they are also equipped with very capable jaws, as three separate visitors to the Beijing Zoo discovered. The first, a drunken 35 year old named Zhang Xinyan, jumped into the panda enclosure to cuddle with 240lb Gu Gu. He was quickly rebuffed and bitten on the legs. The second visitor, a 15 year old boy named Li Xitao, encountered Gu Gu at feeding time. Li was savaged, chunks of flesh torn from his legs so that the bones beneath were showing. In 2009, another dude named Zhang jumped into the panda enclosure to retrieve a toy his child had dropped. Again Gu Gu went for the legs... he was apparently so angry that workers had to pry his jaws open with tools. (Devlin, 2013)

These examples leave us with an uncomfortable feeling: have we perhaps gone too far in trying to sanitize the dangers and inconveniences of real life, to simply deny life's contingencies? Have we given a priority to the mediated notion that a panda bear is cute so that we are no longer able to see the real biological animal beyond its anthropomorphic perception? The impact of screens on interaction between humans and animals lead to a general tendency to humanize animals. The animals we see when watching Discovery are usually trapped in a small TV device and they are apparently harmless. From there it is only a small step to the perception of other people. We project attributes to others that they do not have, because we have learned about their qualities in a wrong context, the context of language and semiotics. This in fact invalid context teaches us to perceive animals as harmless and cute - a misleading perception, but nevertheless one perpetuated by millions of children's books, TV shows and toys and stickers. The signifier, again, has been decoupled from the signified, a physical body is being detached from its image, and a hollow sign is then being instrumentalized to serve other purposes, in this case, consumption.

A different, but nonetheless disturbing example reminds us of the false sense of closeness and intimacy that interconnected computer screens can simulate: a Chinese exchange student in Toronto was on a video chat with her boyfriend in Hong Kong, when it suddenly rang on her front door. She opened the door of her apartment, a man came in, raped and killed her, while her boyfriend, thousands of miles away, kept watching the crime unfolding over the webcam - powerless and not able to intervene, to prevent the crime. This example shows drastically, how the perceived sense of closeness and intimacy that the screen promises is rendered unfounded in a second. The distancing and dividing properties of the screen suddenly yielded only powerlessness and frustration. The distance between the young couple came to be felt in an agonizing, painful way.

## **Chapter Nine: Transparency as a central discourse in a mediated environment**

### **9.1. *Open my Glade (flatten)* (Pipilotti Rist, 2000)**



Figure 20: *Open my glade (flatten)* (Pipilotti Rist, 2000)

Pipilotti Rist created a series of videos for the NBC Astrovision by Panasonic board, overlooking New York's Times Square, titled *Open My Glade (flatten)*. Rist's public art project in New York (Fig. 20) is composed of 16 one-minute slow motion video segments, presented amidst the backdrop of media-frenzied Times Square, and in this site specific dimension of Rist's work reverberates the before mentioned photograph 'Father Duffy' by Lee Friedlander. Just as the stoic monument from 1937 'opens a glade' of focus and resolve in the excessive, extreme, and unregulated expression of the neo-liberal market itself, Rist accomplishes to punch a hole into the ever-changing mediated declarations of who we think we are by virtue of consumption.

Georges Bataille described how children sometimes press their noses and lips up against a shop window, as if they try to get closer to the desired toy object in it. In the process, their faces are flattened and look distorted, yet funny. In Pipilotti Rist's videos, she does essentially the same thing. She appears to press her face up against the glass screen from the inside of a gigantic television set. Rist further manipulates the video

with slow motion and forward and reverse effects, at times with, at times without make-up. The result is a series of silent facial distortions, ideally suited to illustrate what the screen does to the human body. The body is flattened and muted by the screen. By choosing the specific location Times Square for the projections, a sense of claustrophobic enclosure and entrapment can be felt even stronger, since the artist attempts in vain to break through the screen, to escape the media space. In doing so, Rist is commenting on our captivity to screens of all types in our daily life and their distorting effects. In the context of glamour advertising which typically pervades the commercials shown on large urban screens, Rist's violent smearing of her make-up can be interpreted as a soundless scream of isolation that the screen does to the (female) body: it simultaneously idealizes the image of the body and it decouples the body from its own image. Rist's work must be seen in the tradition of negative dialectics:

Negative dialectics seeks the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true - today, in any case - it must also think against itself. If thinking fails to measure itself by the extremeness that eludes the concept, it is from the outset like the accompanying music with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims. (Adorno, 1981)

## 9.2. Transparency encapsulates a visual and moral concept

The quest for transparency, a so-called mega-trend of contemporary society, describes a social ideal, and an emerging strategy, where illusion and deception go hand in hand with the impression of openness and accessibility. Transparency is, technically speaking, a requirement for a screen-dominated environment where a safe, voyeuristic visual perception has subordinated all other modes of perception to second order phenomena. Transparency then, inevitably had to evolve from an effective and powerful technical dimension (shop window, aquarium, windshield, TV and computer screen, etc.) into a moral-ethical dimension, and this shift happened not coincidentally in parallel with the shift from the feudalistic social order to consumerist capitalism. In governments, companies and other organizations, transparency today is viewed increasingly as the central management technique. Numerous management books propagate the need for transparent organizational structures; it is believed that transparency should be a feature for better performance and better services to customers, citizens and other stakeholders.



In the year 2000, car manufacturer Volkswagen opened a new factory in Dresden, Germany. The factory building is entirely made of glass; it should serve as a transparent showcase for the birthplace of a new, top-of-the-line model, the Phaeton. The automaker called the project ‘a symbol of the future’. The glass walls of the factory intend to underline the idea of transparency. Those who walk by the factory outside on the road are able to see at any time, what is going on in the assembly hall. Customers are invited to travel to Dresden, to watch firsthand how their vehicles are assembled, from behind a soundproof transparent screen, just as they would watch an elegant film. Customers can also opt for a three-day package, conceived by the Volkswagen Corporation and the city of Dresden, where the customers receive a city tour, a visit to the Semper Opera, and, after the purchase, they can drive back home in their new Phaeton. At night, the factory building will be lit in an appealing design, to make the show, the spectacle, just perfect. The unique selling point of the VW luxury car model is, according to VW's marketing department, that the customers does not simply buy a car, but a whole experience: a visit to Dresden, where they enjoy cultural highlights and get to watch their car being built in front of their eyes: here, the automotive production is an integral part of the show, the spectacle. The consumer item literally takes its place in choreography for the show; the car replaces the ballet dancer.



Figure 21: The Transparent Factory in Dresden

Automobile production and high-end culture will be perceived as one and the same thing - car culture (Fig. 21). This revocation of the traditional boundaries between high culture and industrial work is ultimately made possible through the glass walls of the new VW plant in Dresden. The entry of commodities into the realm of culture was

one of the main issues of Walter Benjamin's study on the formation of the arcades in Paris in mid-nineteenth century. For Benjamin, the arcades were an early sign of capitalist modernity, because the arcades endowed industrial products with a new perception, and this perception was designed to arouse needs and desires in the city dwellers, of which he previously didn't know they existed. This form of perception is critical for the functioning of consumerist capitalism, as we know it today. The arcades were not the only glass structures that emerged in the 19th century. The world exhibitions in the large cities of the world staged the progress of the industrial age and celebrated the success of the European colonial empires around the world. Huge glass and steel structures, such as the Crystal Palace in London, presented not only the latest technological advances, but there, also indigenous people from Africa and other exotic anthropological findings from overseas territories of the Empire were put on display. In these World Fairs, a spectacle was fabricated from technological and scientific progress, but eventually, this technological spectacle became itself part of the industrial production process, in the form of marketing. Need and desire need to be aroused, awakened to attract buyers; the object of desire is put on display in shop windows, to find buyers. The spectacle is a necessary aspect of capitalist production, according to Guy Debord.

### 9.3. Consumption and production are part of the same process

Benjamin calls this the 'phantasmagoria of capitalism': the arcade is capitalism's home, there the commodity is put on display, the bourgeois class comes to stroll, to see and to be seen, the arcade is the dream home of capitalism. Benjamin claimed: "arcades are houses or passages having no outside - like the dream." (Leslie, 2000)

For Benjamin, it is not so much a false consciousness, that is at the heart of capitalism, but it is this wonderful house, which has no outside. The arcades with their transparent shop windows (today's screens) define the *modus operandi* how reality is produced and structured in capitalist society. The outside should usually not be seen, the sweatshops in China, where iPhones are being assembled, the landfills for nuclear waste, the slaughterhouses, the refugee camps in Lampedusa, etc. Today, in an era in which the outside of the dream is brutally exposed by the media, Volkswagen goes one

step further: it makes the production process fully transparent, to be able to say: Look, everything here is clean, almost sterile. No dirty, exploited workers, no ugly factory halls, which smell like exhaust and toxic paint, no hazardous landfills, none of this is here. Look into every corner and you will see that we have nothing to hide. The core message of a culture of transparency is this: the outside of the dream is now visible, and it is just as beautiful as the dream itself! The outside of the capitalist dream, which could not be seen when Benjamin wrote his arcades project, is now visible to all.

Today's transparency is everywhere in the form of glass walls and windows, not only the beautiful and seductive side of consumption is put on display, but also the process of production - fair trade, biological, environment-friendly, etc. Glass has replaced the walls made out of stone and business itself has become a transparent process. Transparency can be practiced actively and voluntarily or a company can be forced to show to the public what is going on inside. Active transparency occurs when companies consciously decide to be transparent to achieve business goals. Formal reports, such as press releases, annual reports and sustainability reports are important links in the chain of active transparency. Active transparency means that companies operate an open information policy that takes into account not only the interests of the shareholders, but also the interests of a wide range of other actors in the society, in which the company operates. This can be local communities, Governments, environmental organizations such as Greenpeace or interest groups of socially disadvantaged. What a company wants to avoid, is to get into a situation where transparency is imposed on the company. If certain interest groups or the media exert pressure on the company, to make it disclose information or change its policy, the company will be already under general suspicion. Today, a shareholder company has not many opportunities to hide information. One of the main reasons for imposed transparency is the Internet, which promises full transparency of the company, but that promise has not yet been fulfilled. The media constantly examine dubious business practices and the customer today has access to information like never before, by comparing prices on the Internet or access to hundreds of TV channels. If a company is not ethical or is involved in shady business practices, customers no longer buy its products - so goes the wishful thinking. A plethora of organizations of the civil society, such as protest groups and NGOs now act like watchdogs and determine whether big

multinationals, such as Nike are exploiting children workers in sweatshops, or if Shell contaminates the environment or if Monsanto is producing illegally genetically modified food. The company BP, which stands for British Petrol, now wants to be known as 'Beyond Petroleum'. BP today constantly speaks about their social and environmental responsibilities. BP's Website is full of projects that paint BP as a socially and ecologically responsible company. It shows that its Business activities go far beyond the extraction of petroleum. All PR measures serve to show the public that BP is much more today than simply a producer of oil or petrochemicals. BP is active in the market for renewable energy - for example, it operates some solar power plants.

Why, one has to ask, are the biggest polluters and companies with questionable environmental and social impact on the world, the very same ones who tell us that they are role models, that they sponsor academic research about sustainability, accountability and corporate citizenship? Is there maybe something like a need for greenwashing, because the reality of these companies is exactly the opposite? This assumption is based on a psychological defense mechanism, called 'reaction formation' and it can be summarized with a Groucho Marx (1890 – 1977) quote: "There's one way to find out if a man is honest - ask him. If he says, 'Yes,' you know he is a crook." (Marx,G, n.d.) Reaction formation is at work, when a company like Volkswagen brags about its clean diesel technology and builds transparent factories to conceal precisely the fact that it has been deceiving the authorities with a especially designed software that recognizes test situations, in order to circumvent U.S. auto emissions standards. The discourse of transparency is pronounced in many different types and forms in the fields of economy, industry and civil society. Transparency is an important element to maintain and expand the hegemony of capitalist relations. Mass media constructs an ideological hegemony by linking different aspects of social reality. A discourse of transparency functions as a necessary foundation of an ideology of a media democracy, which is based on the idea of an open society. This idea of openness and transparency is embedded in and projected onto society; at the same time the idea serves as a horizon and an ideal for any imagination, as to how a society could or should be structured. Interventions in other countries, whether militarily or economically are always justified, using this argument of openness or better, its absence. To seek the parallel of the human body: the justification of a military intervention in a sovereign country that has a 'democratic

deficit' sounds like the argument of a rapist who complains about lack of openness on behalf of the victim.

From Lacan's point of view, the idea of an open, transparent society is actually an act of closure. The necessary political realism is always an attempt to instantiate a closure of reality. What it aims for is a politics of reality against a politics of the Real. This closure consists in a restriction of being to reality, to the system of appearance defining places and positions of the beings involved in a system, that strives to erase the anarchic and contingent ground of this order, thereby hoping to eradicate the eruption of the Real. Its fiction is that all those entities involved in the situation have clearly defined and counted identities and positions that can be smoothly calculated and managed in a governmental decision process, to the benefit of the hegemonic power.

#### 9.4. Interference of the Real

Pipilotti Rist's installation at New York's Times Square represents the gap in the social discourse, which is caused by what Jacques Lacan calls the Real. The Real does not fit into the symbolic narratives, the ideological construct that a society has built to reaffirm itself. The refugees who are drowning in the Mediterranean Sea contradict the narrative of Europe's openness and generosity. The annoying oil spill off the coast of Florida, contradicts the narrative of a clean, environment- friendly energy provider. If BP likes to talk about a world 'Beyond Petroleum', it is because BP wants to close the gap that actually consists in the antagonistic relationship between BP and various parts of society: inhabitants of disappearing islands are threatened by rising sea levels; this in turn is caused by climate change, due to a massive global burning of fossil fuels. There are those directly affected by environmental hazards, such as the oil spill, but also indirectly, through the exhaust pollution from automobiles and aircraft. Furthermore, there are those groups that do not partake in the distribution of wealth created by the oil boom; on the contrary, they are losing land and resources as a result of the oil boom, etc. 'Beyond Petroleum' is an ideal fantasy of a transparent corporation within a transparent society. This image is used for closing the gap, which is opened up by the Real. In every social discourse, there is the need for closure, and this is an ideological aspect, without which a society would be unable to exist. Hence, ideology is always part

of the discourse of a so-called open society. The fantasy of perfect transparency is, in fact, a smokescreen, an illusion. Transparency is a discourse that works at the level of an imaginary conflict-free, democratic, open society. It is this illusion, which Marx had in mind when he wrote about commodity fetishism. The transparency, which is embodied by the commodity on display in shop windows of shopping malls, is the necessary fill-in material of real capitalist relations. The subtle message of the exhibited goods is that capitalist markets are able to make everything transparent. Another example for this kind of selective transparency are investigative documentaries on television, which allegedly show how real life looks like, behind the official corporate image. These TV features give the impression that society has full insight and access to the organization's internal relations. The present ideological process thus is founded on a twofold strategy. First, there is the advertised item itself, an object of desire on display for the public, it can be a fetishized chocolate bar or a political candidate (in the words of Benjamin, the inside of the dream). Secondly, there is the reality behind the beautiful image, the ugly side to it. By defacing the magical object in a Brechtian sense, by opening the black box, to show the trivial mechanics behind the beautiful facade of things, the public feels that they are no longer fooled (the outside of the dream). However, the permanent display of this outside has become a symptom of the ideology of transparency, which ultimately ensures that everything stays as it is. Nobody today admits errors and apologizes more frequently than politicians or leaders of big companies, albeit this does not prevent them to go on about their business as before.

In Benjamin's *phantasmagoria*, the world of Parisian arcades, he did not speak of the supplement of transparency of the consumer dream yet, but the material basis for its formation was already given. The window shoppers in the arcades were caught in an artificial world of transparent glass and mirrors. The arcade was a technology of hope on the horizon; their task was to break with the rigid structures of society, to overcome the opaque and static hierarchies of feudalism. Their promise was that capitalism means more wealth for all, because capitalism stands for greater social mobility based on individual performance. In this sense, today's cyberspace is the logical heir of the Parisian arcades. The transparent world of cyberspace is often celebrated as a new territory, where the laws of the physical world do not hold. The physical world seems already foreclosed for new generations; it is overcrowded with people and all its

resources are owned by a few. Cyberspace, on the contrary, is not only infinite, it can be created at will; this new territory promises new common ground and a plethora of possibilities, of new ways of interacting. But how does this new interactivity work? The media consumer, first as TV-zapper, and today as a web surfer is no longer content with a look in the mirror and onto the object of consumption - he takes pride in the fact that he is aware of the problems attached to this unsustainable way of life. He is informed; he has a social and environmental awareness. He believes he is someone who feels deep empathy with the other, with the exploited workers in China or Bangladesh, and therefore he refuses to consume the products, that are being assembled there. However, his empathy is actually not directed at the other - he will probably never meet or talk to any of these workers in his life. His empathy is in fact still directed at himself, he is trapped in the narcissistic short circuit of stimulus and response, the mediated, abortive short circuit, that is, in fact, just a mirror in the guise of a different technology. The media displays objects of desire, and one of these objects may well be a good cause. It can be a quest for transparency, but it can also be rather a racist, or sexist cause. The mechanism is all the same. This new type of flâneur (the zapper, the surfer) is still far from being actively involved in anything, because his activity is reduced to being a consumer; he may be concerned with his attitudes and style, but he remains passive in the sense that he is allegorically identified with the spectral dimension of the other.

A drastic example is the consumer of pornography who learns about his own sexual desires by watching spectral others; he learns what sexual needs he is supposed to have. Perhaps he gets excited by watching others having sex, but he remains passive in the sense that his excitement is abortive. It does not lead to a fulfillment or transformation of his spiritual life, which could be a consequence of sexual activity. This consumer of adult entertainment is thus very similar, in his passivity, to intellectuals who suffer upon watching all the misery in the world (the spectral world) and who are outraged when they see images of war on television, who then criticize that wars are not shown drastically enough. They may write a comment to express their anger and their fantasies about a nonviolent, transparent society, while they continue to live calmly in their middle-class existences, far away from the violent realities of life. The outrage usually disappears as soon as the TV is turned off, just as the excitement disappears when the adult film is turned off. The media-induced *ersatzhandlung*

generates a passivity that is deemed active. Commodity fetishism thus reaches a new level in the realm of social relations; it simply means that social relations are commoditized, by way of mediatization.

If a screen based consumer wants to get back in touch with nature, at least mentally, he seeks the sight onto the sea or a forest, best from behind glass, and the swimming pool should be properly heated. He demands certainty that all the products he uses were produced in an ecologically correct manner; no animals were harmed in the process, fair trade standards were applied, etc. He wants it explicitly written onto the products. The shielding qualities of the screen, the screen as an umbrella that protects not only against wind and rain, but also against other threats and inconveniences of nature, should go along with a screen that allows us the perception of the world, which we have lost when we, as humanity, have settled, have ceased to be nomads and explorers. Botanical parks and zoological gardens (places where the spectator still had to move at least a little bit) were early precursors of television, a technology of telepresence that could bring the most exotic animals and remotest areas of the world into our living rooms. And not only that, but also ludicrous violence, wars, dangerous sex, etc., because everything was safe now - banned behind a screen.

The roller coaster provides some physical thrill. When they were built, camps and parks stood outside from everyday life and the work place, but now, their closed, exceptional status makes them representative of power and sovereignty in the world today. Camps and parks are ideal places where the state of humanity can be measured, and one is tempted to say that consumer capitalism has transformed large parts of the world into parks and camps.

## **Chapter Ten: Mediated spaces and the emergence of new categories of perception**

### **10.1. *Filme Socialisme* (Jean-Luc Godard, 2010)**





Figure 22: Film still from *Filme Socialisme* (Jean-Luc Godard, 2010)

Today, a tourist is not conceivable without a photo camera, and what was, at first, a privilege of a few wealthy, has become a mass phenomenon, which comprises all social classes. The title of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Filme Socialisme* (Fig. 22) points out somewhat sarcastically, that, when everyone owns his means of production (a video camera), then socialism has effectively become reality in the audiovisual sector. Godard's *Filme Socialisme* shows how the mass distribution of digital cameras changes the semiotics of cinema, and, as a result, if we follow the logic of anti-mimesis, our perception of reality. Changes within the language of cinema are, in effect, changes in the symbolic representation of the real, which look back on reality, thus creating a new reality.

The first section of the film is set in a contemporary environment where photography and tourism appear combined: the plot is located on a cruise ship and there, conversations take place between people who have embarked on this journey as passengers and tourists. Conversations are recorded as fragments in a mixture of visual styles; high resolution uncompressed video and video of low quality exist side by side, some scenes seem to have been recorded with a consumer home video camera or a cell phone. Godard makes no attempt to show any kind of consistency: neither cinema technology, nor the plot provide any coherence to construct the semblance of a film dramaturgy, as most films do. Godard proposes instead to explore cinema in its artificiality. So he does not use cinema as a medium to tell a story, but he uses a plot to

say something about the state of the medium cinema - and thus reality. This means that the spectator is challenged to examine his own role as a producer of images and as a consumer of images; in a digital society, which is awash with pictures - moving images and stills - virtually everyone produces cinema, hence 'socialisme'. Godard's film juxtaposes fragments and separates images and words with the aim of breaking apart any consistent style; the signature of an author is expected to completely collapse. On the cruise ship, this floating Tower of Babel, the substantive characteristics of the recorded conversations are of no interest: any attempt on behalf of the viewer to focus on the narrative must fail, therefore it becomes clear, that the film does not work on the traditional level of narrative, but it does work on a different level. We see people in their leisure activities, on a cruise ship. Leisure in this case is transposed into an imposing capitalist ritual. On the ship it becomes clear that recreation, as a real experience of liberation and rest from work is virtually impossible in this total, immersive consumer culture; the cruise is by no means a comfortable escape from a daily life routine dominated by work, and it shall not be used for recreation. All activities in consumer culture are designed as compulsions to consume more. The cruise ship is the embodiment of capitalist utopia, a non-place of the imperative for entertainment, a floating gated community with a strict hierarchy, a tower of Babel with closed doors. The compulsive video recordings of the targeted destinations, formerly important places in human history, as for example Egypt, Greece, Palestine, Odessa, Naples, Barcelona, Tunisia, have already been transformed into a digital backdrop. Except from their current formal image value they have nothing to offer. The passengers on the cruise ship are highly potent, wealthy consumers, which consume the places as photo-ops with their instant-digital-image-capturing-device before continuing on their shopping spree. Clearly, the real attractions of this trip are not the targeted destinations, but the ship itself, the floating arcade, which functions as another metaphor for the inertia at the center of mobile technology, where the 'travelers' literary stay put in the same place. This type of travel is equivalent to a non-stop flight around the world, at a low altitude, with the voice of the captain announcing from time to time: "We are now flying over Athens, Greece. Please take your pictures, our time window is three minutes."

The second part of the film shows a mother, a son and an older sister, and a pair of filmmakers. This section deals with linguistic criticism, where language has degraded to a collection of empty signs. Most of the spoken or written words continue to work as signifiers in the film, but they can no longer be understood by employing an institutional syntax; there is no direct attempt to construct a compelling narrative. In the depicted conversations and discussions, questions about freedom, equality and fraternity arise, but, at the same time it becomes clear, how pointless it is to use and debate these terms, when a content-related erosion of meaning has already reached a point of no return. Godard's attempt is to make a distinction between sign and signifier. Signs are everywhere and we can see them all the time, but the conditions have changed fundamentally for their meaning, the conditions for meaning are in continuous change. Godard makes use of the techniques of subtitling and translation: at one point, a translation is true, at another point it is not true, later it is shown that a translation as a metaphor would perhaps make more sense than a direct translation. The practice of subtitling has always been a little studied discipline, and the result is that most of the time a translation is fundamentally a technocratic approach where a machine is supposed to find connections and supposed similarities between languages. This ultimately forecloses that we can get close to a language, to fully understand its core. Instead of trying to start to repair this condition, Godard rather wants to get to a new level, which only appears when the conditioned sign systems are left behind. The dictionary system where a word in one language is paired with its alleged equivalent in another language is in Godard's film completely destroyed. Godard, at the end of his life and his career, seems to only have one final goal: to undermine the supposedly comprehensive, carefully constructed world of language, the institutionalized concrete syntax of narrative cinema; to understand the plot and follow the dramaturgy is exactly what is not intended in this case. *Filme Socialisme* is explicitly opaque and incomprehensible - it requires a different, a new level of perception.

Ironically, this trend can also be seen in the field of politics and the attitude towards the media. Everywhere, it seems, people doubt the fairness of democratic elections, they react with cynicism towards the representatives of the people, and many TV viewers deeply question the veracity of the news sources. However, anyone who buys a ticket to enter a movie theatre expects a compelling and entertaining narrative

that makes sense. Can it be that our everyday reality has become so complex and contradictory, and is so hard to decipher that viewers demand, at least from a movie, coherent stories, and a consistent symbolic universe? Perhaps do viewers expect from a movie to provide a moral compass, now that the church has, for many, lost this function. Meanwhile, commercials provide in thirty seconds exactly this: a character to identify with, and - not so much morals, but a product, to guide our desires, if not our faith. Consumer brands are filling the void.

#### 10.2. Tourism - a category of perception

An effective antidote to this trend would not be to neglect the symbolic aspect of reality in favor of other aspects; it is rather paramount to better understand the workings of the media that produces and conveys these images, and thus be able to resist the temptation to consider image and place to be interchangeable. Mass tourism has developed over the last 175 years and it is no coincidence that it started at about the same time when the daguerreotype process was first introduced commercially. Thomas Cook (1808-1892) had the idea for a British railway company: for the price of one shilling per passenger, he sold tickets and travel provisions for a train. Cook earned a share of the prices but the train tickets still existed as legal contracts between the carrier and the passenger, so Cook did not act as an employee of the railway company, but as a free (travel) agent. The title 'mediator' would apply perfectly to Thomas Cook, just like today, in the age of social networks it applies to companies such as UBER. Around the year 1840, suddenly and at the same time, the world saw the birth of two new types of media: photography and travel agencies. The first privately chartered passenger train should be spelled out as the birth of mass tourism.

The withdrawal of society from urban space as public space happens in parallel with the process of mediatization as a new form of enclosure. On defining event shall serve to illustrate this development. The student revolts of the *Situationist International* culminated in the riots in Paris in May 1968, and then, urban space was the common ground where experimentation and protest took place. The streets of Paris then turned briefly into battlefields, the struggle aimed at reclaiming the streets in a desire to end the Vietnam war, to demand more democracy, more social justice, etc. But General de

Gaulle (1890 – 1970) did not put an end to the riots by appearing in person and delivering a speech on the balcony of the Hotel de Ville; instead, he addressed the people of France via television, he spoke from a TV studio to the entire nation, thereby shifting the territory of the battle away from public urban space to an area where the state at the time still held the undisputed monopoly, and thus could align the viewers of an entire nation onto a single vanishing point. The government's media monopoly had effectively, at this point emptied out the significance of the street. The street was simply no longer the place where public debate should take place. State television then came to be labeled public television, to foster the false belief that this kind of television was made by and for the general public. However, it was still made by a small elite, and it was entirely financed and controlled by the state. A street agitator, who, at the times of Lenin (1870-1924) could gather mass audiences, suddenly had no chance against the prerogative of this media apparatus, where selective opinions and points of view could be turned on and off at will. Any street agitator today is equivalent to a lunatic street preacher; nobody takes him seriously, because they are not part of the king's court, which is the new role the media have taken on.

The tactics and strategies derived from Psychogeography must today take into account the fact that urban space has become a mere extension of the media space. The impact of media technology on the human-to-human interactions and face-to-face communications has shifted away from the public space of the city, its squares and streets to the information superhighway with its nodes and crossings, platforms and networks. However, this does not mean that urban space cannot be used any longer as a place of intervention - it can, but it must be used according to the logic of media space.

### 10.3. The screen as the central device in a consumerist society

The age of consumption is rooted in the permanent creation of demands, of desires. The creation of desires and modern mass tourism are two phenomena that symptomize a new form of perception - the perception mediated by screens. It was this new concept of looking at the world that eventually led to justified criticism - Guy Debord's critique of the *Society of the Spectacle* is one of it. A consequence of the transformation of perception through screens, however, is that screens must be ever

more physically present in the society of the spectacle. The screen itself is the object of desire. In the screen-based society of the spectacle, everything is mediated, first and foremost, space. We may still speak of urban or rural space, but we must think of all space as mediated space. Guy Debord argues: "everything that was once directly lived has turned into a mere representation." (Debord, 1994: thesis 1) and that social life has undergone a change from "being into having, and having into merely appearing." (Debord, 1994: thesis 17) If this holds true, the screen certainly functions as the core device in this development. We should examine how the screen was developed initially as a concept, then as a device and finally as a medium. Furthermore, we have to ask, what a 'directly lived life' looked like before there were screens and whether this way of life may still be possible today, in spite of the existence of screens. Debord writes: "the spectacle is not a collection of images, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images." (Debord, 1994: thesis 17) Mediatization is a specific term to theorize media related changes in perception and social interaction. Originally the concept of media logic goes back to David Altheide and Robert Snow. To understand the role of media, they argued that it was "necessary to ask how the media as a form of communication transforms our perception and interpretation of the social." (Altheide / Snow, 1979: 9) People who consume mediated information (news) do not always recognize that their doubts and distrust in respect to the political institutions does not only derive from the cynicism and deceptiveness of the politicians and the institutions themselves. Politicians may make use of unstable and unreliable statements and codes, but today, these inconsistencies are not necessarily a sign of willful deceit and propaganda. The identities of the subjects (thus also the identities of the news audience) themselves have become unstable. A hierarchical, ideological discourse resolves this fallacy artificially, by assigning a place in the symbolic order, where the identity of the subject (gender, race, nation, social class, etc.) can take hold.

However, with the progressive demise of the discourse of the master, this rather static (feudal) concept of identity will be questioned again and a new discourse can be found at the level of social relations. To fill in the vacuum after the collapse of the symbolic efficiency of the discourse of the master, capitalism just comes at the right time to serve as a horizon beyond which nothing else seems possible. The end of capitalism is therefore equated with a major global disaster; the non-existence of

alternatives to capitalism seems logical. As a result, capitalism itself becomes depoliticized, it therefore comes across as a given, a natural phenomenon, no need for explanations, its circles of boom and bust seem as normal and inevitable as the changes from day to night. Where the signifier of the master and its symbolic efficiency disappear, politics appears only in disordered convulsions, especially when it loses its targets, its clear and simple enemies, when it does not know where to turn. When politics appears, then in the form of diffuse, contradictory and competitive struggles for identity - not as a common, political project that would overcome differences, if only to build alliances for higher goals. Hence, the pursuit of self-interests can have a left-wing orientation today, an ecological orientation tomorrow and the day after tomorrow it can take on a racist color, as the refugee crisis shows: these convulsions should not be mistaken for old-school political convictions.

Just as the creation of demand makes the screen the prior object of desire, the priority of the screen is to hold and exert power. Identity then *is* the screen, since identity is based on power. The universal value of solidarity is in demise, causes are exchangeable, as long as they serve the prior self-interest: power. At the same time, economy in its dominant form, capitalism, is naturalized and awarded the status of a science, it is believed that markets should follow almost physical principles and should not be disturbed by politics. Hence, the locus where political struggle can take place is the semiosphere - a struggle centered on cultural signifiers, not a struggle centered on material conditions or the well-being of citizens. In this respect, the struggle in the area of politics (what books to read, which symbols are allowed, what is politically correct?) echoes the struggle between competing brands in the area of consumption (what kind of coffee does one prefer?)

It follows that revolution is no longer possible with regard to the content, since the content has disappeared behind his form, after signifier and signified have been decoupled. A first necessary step might be to actually acknowledge the total eclipse of meaning and to deny any form any relevance. One example would be today's monarchies: they have no power, but nonetheless continue to exist, as pure form. If they exist apparently only as zombies, they should first be destroyed as pure form - revolution today would mean to get rid of empty, hollow signifiers. Godard's late fragmented films do exactly this. They attack film as form. They are affronts to the

conditioned gaze, to pre-formatted ways of viewing, of reading, of design. They affront the all-encompassing technocratic imposition of autocorrection-as-you-type.

#### 10.4. Sites become sights - place as pure sign

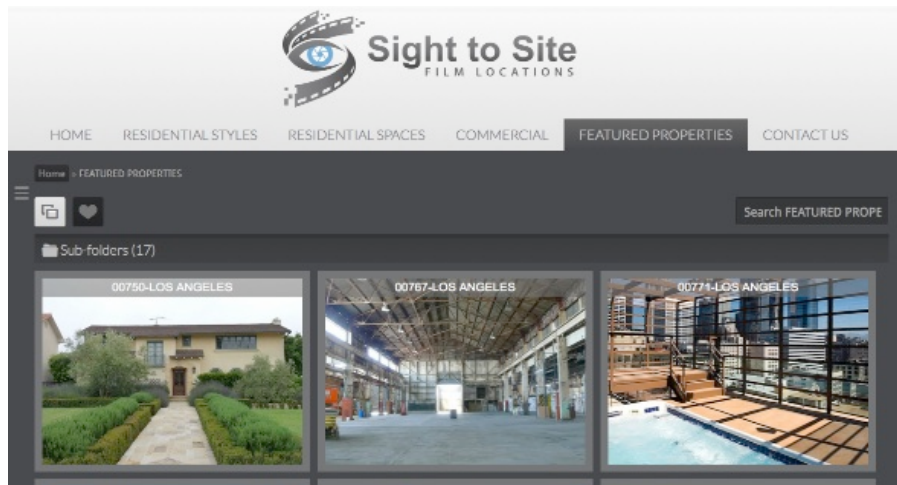


Figure 23: Screen shot of the website *Sight to Site* Film Locations

An American company that offers its services in the areas of location scouting and location management is called *Sight to Site* (Fig. 23) and in this case one can speak of ‘nomen est omen’, because it reverses the previously analyzed process that could be summarized in the brief formula ‘site to sight’. The special context in which these services are offered, cinema and audiovisual production, suggests that the here promoted places are no longer perceived as real places, in a conventional sense, but as places, which have a certain formal quality attached to them, a sign value of a cinematic image quality. This is a case of applied anti-mimesis since it follows a top-down approach, which favors an ideological concept, or structure, and then aspires to make the real world fit into it. How is this reversal of common perception possible? An interesting parallel can be found in the historic simultaneity of the invention of photography and the advent of modern mass tourism. The daguerreotype was introduced as a photochemical process in 1839; it was then followed by drastic changes in the general visual culture: the possibility of mass reproducibility of images, the panorama as a first attempt to add an immersive quality to bi-dimensional pictures, the



technical possibilities of photo montage, retouching and, generally, all kinds of visual manipulations, like the capturing of ghosts on film - all of these techniques were used to great effect because the overall assumption was that a photograph only documents, that it is a proper representation of reality. As a result, the new age of visuality changed the narrative aesthetics and the formal qualities of what we traditionally refer to as place. The narrative representation of a site changes when it is possible to produce a photograph of that site. Photographers try even today to use the perceived immediacy of visual forms to communicate, and very soon the photographic (iconic) image becomes synonymous with the place it should represent. As often in media history, the medium is rendered invisible, and therefore it is not, or only insufficiently perceived.

Whenever a place exists already synonymous with its image, its aesthetic and formal qualities will be replicated in the human perception - and reduced to the visual quality. Simply put, someone who visits a site and already knows it as an image, is doomed to recognize it in visual terms. In other words, it is the apparent omnipresence of transcendence, which renders a diachronic experience insufficient. As a result of this dominant visuality of perception, the observer develops a tendency to put a screen - imagined or real - between him and the object. Alternatively, the observer at times is unable to realize that there is already a screen between him and the object, even when this is, strictly physically speaking, not the case. The inherent danger in this mode of perception resides in the temptation to base a whole sense of reality on mediated, which means idealized and sanitized, images. A screen-based society would be doomed to make anti-mimesis its *modus operandi*. Oscar Wilde begins his dialogue on anti-mimesis by having Vivian assert the following:

I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty (to Enjoy Nature). People tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before; that it reveals her secrets to us; and that after a careful study of Corot and Constable we see things in her that had escaped our observation. My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape, I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have no Art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her. (McGrath, 1999: 19-21)

The realization of one's own consciousness is, at the same time, a realization of one's own limitations and this realization led to a quest for competitive advantages. Vivian might be the prototype of a woman who would resort to breast implants to defy the natural course of things, but the origin of this worldview goes back much further. In prehistoric times, when the transition from the hunter and gatherer phase to agriculture and cattle breeding took place, something must have changed fundamentally in the consciousness of humankind. This fundamental shift has been symbolized in the story of the expulsion from the garden of Eden, which began with the realization of one's own nakedness, which must be read as vulnerability here, essentially as weakness. Upon this realization, mankind seeks shelter and knowledge, and with this knowledge comes self-confidence and progress, which differs from pure instinct since it is based on faith in one's own abilities. Walter Benjamin interpreted progress with the description of Paul Klees' artwork *Angelus Novus* as a development which humanity has taken since the moment of original sin. The mere fact that people separated themselves from nature, brought humanity on a fatal path, where all good intentions are no longer useful:

The Klee etching shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1973: 249)

This kind of progress produces not only a heap of ruins, debris and waste, but it creates also a hybrid territory, which combines technological concepts of nature and culture, where man is always striving to gain control over processes that were formerly beyond his control and left him powerless, even vulnerable. Agriculture and animal breeding are the first manifestations of this hybrid thinking that has now found its preliminary highlights in the decoding and encoding of the human DNA, the use of nuclear energy, space travel, etc.

Nature and culture, traditionally opposing concepts, led in their symbiosis to scientific thinking, this in turn let designers and engineers emerge, who would not

suffice to observe and analyze the world but rather practically apply their knowledge. Science alone could bring forth a discipline that was able to liberate itself from the strangleholds of religious dogma. Science laid out its reasoning on objective criteria such as efficiency, evidence, logic, etc, and thus emancipated from the belief in wonder and trauma of fateful events, generated by overwhelming powers that degraded people to passives objects which could only hope and pray to be redeemed, if they followed divine commandments and were spared the punishment of hell. Empirical thinking was related from the very start with the increase in yields in agriculture and livestock (which also led to the shift from nomadic living to sedentary living). This led ultimately to the industrial age and the capitalist economic system, where a huge increase in productivity became possible, a productivity that dwarfs all cycles of nature. However, natural resources and natural cycles are now, because of these developments, subjected to an immense stress, which is due to the fact, that today the machine, the most efficient and emotionless cultural product, was raised to the measure of all things.

## Summary Part II

The second part of my thesis analyzed the phenomenon of substitution. In fact, substitute location only becomes possible by the presence of mediatization. This phenomenon describes a process of gradual dominance of the media and the decoupling of the image from the body, or from a real place. However, mediatization means more than that, it describes the creation of new structures that cause changes of traditional power and ownership structures, a process that is similar to the enclosures at the beginning of the capitalist society and then again to colonization processes during the time of imperialism. Whenever new territories are discovered or created, a struggle over prerogatives and power ensues immediately.

The connection between a place and its mediatized double has to be illuminated again, but from a psychogeographical perspective; especially the retroactive and feedback effects of symbolic space on real places deserve special attention. We must try to redefine, what a medium is, and in our case, particularly audiovisual media, such as photography, film and video, but also geographical mapping systems and social networks. I have looked at the role of today's dominant device, which all visual media

have in common: the transparent screen (TV, computer, cell phone), the central feature of contemporary consumer society. Benjamin's Arcades, Debord's spectacle: the concepts of mimesis and diegesis proved again to be useful in an analysis of the screen device. Finally, it must be clarified whether there can still be something other than a reflexive, 'self-obsessed' culture, when the ongoing shifting relations between signifier and signified undermine ultimately any politically motivated manifestation, a process where the screen device plays out its abortive qualities. Identity must develop in response to a comprehensible matrix in which it's embedded, but what if this structure is no longer commensurate with a natural feedback of our organic environment and with our localized everyday life, which we technically live in real places - instead this structure is defined by media networks that offer an ever increasing density of connectedness, generated by for-profit corporations and imposed on us in exchange for some novelty in our private lives and residual individualist attitudes with which we constantly feed them. Have we become the raw material of a newly enclosed territory that is ripe for colonization and exploitation? The obvious commercial intentions of the platforms' owners and designers arguably corrupt our usage of these media networks from the outset.

### **PART III: THE INSIDE OF MEDIA SPACE AND 'ACTING OUT'**

#### **Chapter Eleven: Inside the hybrid media space**

##### **11.1. *Teletubbies* (BBC Children's series, 1997-2001)**



Figure 24: Still from the BBC children's TV series *Teletubbies*

Hybrid landscapes, landscapes that are created and formed by people and their culture technologies, can be found everywhere. The soft green hills that are thoroughly equipped with state of the art technology, such as in the BBC's TV children's series called *Teletubbies* (Fig. 24), are not a fiction, but rather illustrations of real role models. The Teletubbies are four large, brightly colored creatures that live together in a totally controlled territory, part camp and part park, called Teletubbyland. These creatures are like young toddlers: playful, clumsy and silly. Moreover, they have one thing children lack: They have television screens implanted on their bodies, perhaps not coincidentally on their bellies, where the navel, the 'belly button' is located. In other words, they are a hybrid mix of a toddler and a machine. The landscape around them is also a hybrid landscape made of technology and features of nature, such as trees and green lawns, which remind on golf courses. They are four technological babies who love each other dearly and live carelessly together in their own world of childhood imagination. Each program features the Teletubbies in Teletubbyland, where technology is the answer to every need: Tubby Toast, Tubby Custard and a conscientious vacuum cleaner, the Noo-Noo. From time to time, the Teletubbies' navel become TV screens that light up, bringing them scenes of regular children from the real world. While Teletubbieland seems to offer the consumer comforts of gadgets, abundant junk food, and television as remedies, a critical perspective hints to just the opposite. As in the absurdist plays of Sartre and Beckett, nothing happens during an episode of *Teletubbies*. In place of the

standard adventures and excitement so typical of children's literature, the Teletubbies live in a sterile environment: they eat and sleep in a sort of high-tech underground capsule set in a green and manicured meadow surrounded by some trees and rabbits, powered by wind-generated energy, with a servant (Noo-Noo) who cleans up after them. Like the artificial suburban world of the *Truman Show*, Teletubbieland looks too good to be true, too saturated with color to be natural. Teletubbieland is a world governed by the gaze of a smiling baby's face. The face is superimposed on the sun; it looks down and giggles incessantly. Periscope-like speakers rise from the ground to direct the Teletubbies in a commanding voice what to do next. What passes for adventures in Teletubbieland are two things: various mishaps with the creature comforts of seating and sleeping, and the watching of the televisions in their stomachs. Each episode includes this interlude of watching the Teletubbies watching a short video of the real world, not once but twice in a row. In one typical scene, the Teletubbies make their enthusiastic preparations for viewing. Interrupted by a whirling pinwheel like firefighters from their meal of tubbie toast, they rush out of their subterranean dwelling, making the usual giggling and 'eh, oh' sounds over and over. There follows a scene of lying on the ground in a kind of writhing ecstasy, during which one of the Teletubbies is selected as the designated television of the day. In this instance, the video depicts children putting on raincoats and going out to play in the rain. There is no apparent connection between the world of the children and Teletubbieland, although in a direct address to the Teletubbies at one point a child asks whether it rains there as well. The fact that such a question can arise suggests the child's awareness that something is very different about Teletubbieland. The real world of children engaged in trivial activity appears rather uninteresting and even bland by comparison to Teletubbieland. But the desire of the Teletubbies to gaze upon the children is literally visceral and ecstatic. Why do the Teletubbies watch the stories? Teletubbieland turns out to be more like a prison, or refugee camp than a park; Teletubbieland is a place where every action is regulated, monitored and strictly controlled. Under this totalitarian enclosure, in which not only their bodies, but also their minds and souls are hopelessly limited, the Teletubbies nevertheless dream of a better world, one in which there are real children doing real and rather mundane things, like taking a walk on a rainy afternoon. From the sanitized world of their gated community, they gaze on the images of another world, a world they

can never inhabit or experience directly. Like the tantalizing promise of happiness made by consumer culture, life in Teletubbieland is a matter of constant desire; but their desire is rather the opposite to the desire for more consumption. They long for challenges and an opportunity to develop and learn, but this is a future foreclosed to them. Although all their needs are met, life in Teletubbieland remains about the same, boring, repetitive and pointless, and they will never be autonomous grown-ups. Unlike the real world depicted in their belly televisions, there are no challenges here, no growth and development, no real problems to solve. When difficulties do arise, as in an episode where the toaster spits out hundreds of burnt slices of Tubbie Toast, the Teletubbies can only laugh and eat. They are helpless to do more. The Teletubbies do not speak, they giggle and exclaim ‘eh-oh’ and ‘bye-bye’, but their language abilities stop here. Their laughter betrays a disempowerment that is partly rooted in their pre-language status and partly in their status of being passively exposed to a technological super-ego. Simply, what is missing in the Teletubbies is any form of ego, of agency.

Horkheimer and Adorno write: “Fun is a medicinal bath. The pleasure industry never fails to prescribe it. It makes laughter the instrument of the fraud practiced on happiness.” (Horkheimer / Adorno, 2002: 141) Teletubbieland combines the world of parks and camps; despite their apparent happiness and solidarity, the Teletubbies endure the endless monotony of inmates whose every move is controlled. Gazing upon the images of real children, these creatures live in a constant state of unfulfilled desire. *Teletubbies* is a program that Walter Benjamin would refer to as a dialectical image: an arresting mixture of contradictory impulses and impressions. Although it is bankrupt from a social and intellectual standpoint (even the infamous eclipse of meaning doesn’t make sense here, because there is no meaning to begin with), it tells us something about the myths and contradictions of a technological consumerist society and here resides its subversive power. Like in the movie *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008), we are exposed to the kinds of worlds that we are about to create: sterile, technological, monitored and totalitarian camps (with the chubby human beings depicted in *Wall-E* one can draw a stunning similarity to the Teletubbies). But now, in an act of reversing, we discover our new desire (which, we have by now learned, after all is nothing but a sensation that grows in sync with scarcity and diminishes in sync with abundance): nature - in form of a plant (*Wall-E*) or children playing in the mud (*Teletubbies*). As shown before, the

non-diegetic element only can be rendered visible through the contrast, to paraphrase Adorno who said that there “can be no real life in the wrong/fake life” - Es gibt kein wahres Leben im Falschen (Adorno, 1997: 43) - we must, on the contrary, state that “there only can be real life within the fake life” (Es gibt das wahre Leben nur im Falschen!), as a form of transgression, rebellion. Parks and camps as substitute locations symbolize and enact human judicial and biological realities. As extraordinary spaces, camps and parks mix in different ways the dreams and nightmares of society, transcending ordinary experience to become models of bio-political purity or instead embody the deepest human misery and alienation. The current global order is one in which the model of the camp has been projected onto vulnerable populations around the world, while consumer society is building gated communities, ghettos of a different kind: the obese and thoroughly immobilized humans (Fig. 25), who are glued to their high tech screens while suckling super-sized sodas in the movie *Wall-E* actually live in such a totalitarian theme park, which is, in this case, not a luxury cruise ship, as in Godard’s *Filme Socialisme*, but a space ship, that had to leave planet earth, which is transformed into the proper ‘trash heap’, left over from decades of mass consumerism facilitated by mega-corporations.

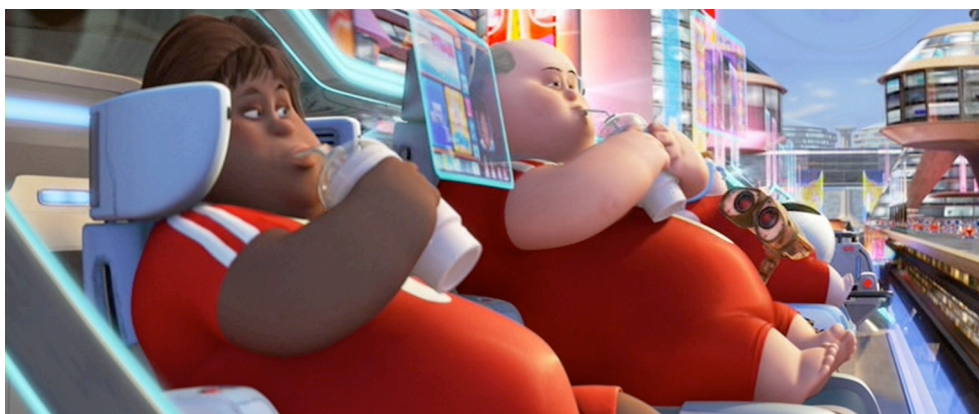


Figure 25: Film still from *Wall-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008)

Nature, in its wild, chaotic form, is simply overwhelming and unbearable for the people, hence, nature must be tamed, and if it is once brought under control, we assign it its proper place. The Teletubbies are creatures that represent a dystopic version of an



identity created by mass media culture, such as television. They show us what it is like to live inside the substitute location, which is media space. The only redeeming feature for the Teletubbies is the time when they are allowed to have a peek into the real world, which is foreclosed to them in the same fashion as media space is foreclosed to us.

Walter Benjamin has, in his Parisian arcades project, recognized the substitute (*ersatz*) function in the display of a sanitized, non-contingent representation of real life. He collected items from shop windows, which serve as consumerist fetish objects, attracting our desires and lusts, but Benjamin stripped them from their usual context, and in doing so, he rendered them absurd, in a proper surrealist fashion. All the goods and objects that are presented in the arcades as if they were low hanging fruit, which you can have at any time without taking risks or making an effort, were, for Benjamin, the true symbols of the hidden cruelty of the industrial workplace, where these products are manufactured to create surplus value. Ever since people developed magical, mythical, religious, or other thoughts concerning where they came from and how their story could develop further, there is a philosophy of history. Philosophy in the most common sense is the telling of a coherent story about one's own existence since the beginning of time. Understood this way, creation myths or stories about the deeds of the ancestors of a clan represent at least a form of a general philosophy of history. The most elementary images are therefore always part of even the most complex stories. The naive belief in progress finds its metaphor in a straight line, which must inevitably result in a redeeming destination. Another well-known image starts with the original sin, the fall and the prospect of an eventual return to paradise. Max Weber (1864-1920) couples with this image of progress that Western capitalist societies draw as a process of rationalization and an increase of efficiency a regressive line, caused by the consistent increase of reason itself. Weber speaks of capitalism as a system defined by an inherent destructive self-reference, resulting in "mechanized ossification, embellished with a sort of rigidly compelled sense of self-importance." (Weber, 2002: 124)

The industrial workplace is located, in the words of Walter Benjamin on 'the outside of the dream'. All the parks and malls are attempts to construct a new version of the Garden of Eden, and implicitly, they suggest that by entering the mall, we are returning to the paradise lost. The paradise of consumer capitalism is the mall, the gated

community, the brothel; an ideal place, equipped full to the brim with beauty, luxury, air conditioning, food and drink in abundance, and, above all, safe entertainment, thrilling but harmless stimuli. Today, it is the shopping mall with its multiplex-cinema department, where the dream of an all inclusive, immersive, total consumer and entertainment environment has become reality, perhaps including an all-you-can-eat buffet and flat-rate sex. The mall is in this sense at a maximum opposed to a natural environment, where the unpredictability of the weather, wild animals or other contingencies could get in the way. The essence of this is, however, that the consumer elite, just as in ancient times the Romans in their thermal baths, needs an army of service personnel (slaves, in case of the Romans) to fuel the furnaces in the catacombs underneath the spa to keep the water temperature comfortably warm.

#### 11.2. The view from the inside of a map

In the following I will try to explain in how far the map is a medium, and, moreover, an instrument for the mediatization of geographical space, an instrument that entitles to and radiates interpretation of sovereignty and power. Maps serve as visual means to reduce complexity. All things, properties, and relationships that appear to us as something in its own right, are essentially parts of systems, and it is possible to determine where these parts are located in the system. The entire world civilization is in itself a large and very complex evolving system, which includes other systems with varying degrees of complexity. It is the original function of geometry, to reduce complexity. Science relies on visual means to better bring complexity to expression. Flow charts, maps and diagrams are means to express otherwise very complex phenomena, however, no one would dare to call these visual expressions of scientific facts art. In this respect, the first landscape paintings were, by no means, art; they were political instruments to manifest territorial claims of ownership. The perspective of a satellite (or a microscope, etc.) is not a human perspective, but one of an image machine. The map is thus beyond our human perspective. The Google Maps application, for example, is a comprehensive mapping system, it consists of satellite images, and in addition, the perspective shifts finally from a bird's eye view to a street view, here it is the moving car that captures, with a special image machine, its

surroundings in 360° photographs. The two perspectives are part of the same mapping system, but the technology used for the image production is either a camera on a satellite, or a camera on a moving car. While the satellite camera, in principle, can capture all oceans and all mountain ridges of the world in bird's eye view, the photographing car on the street remains bound to the streets that are open for car traffic. Here, one can encounter a striking parallel to Guy Debord's map of Paris, titled *The naked city* (Fig. 26).

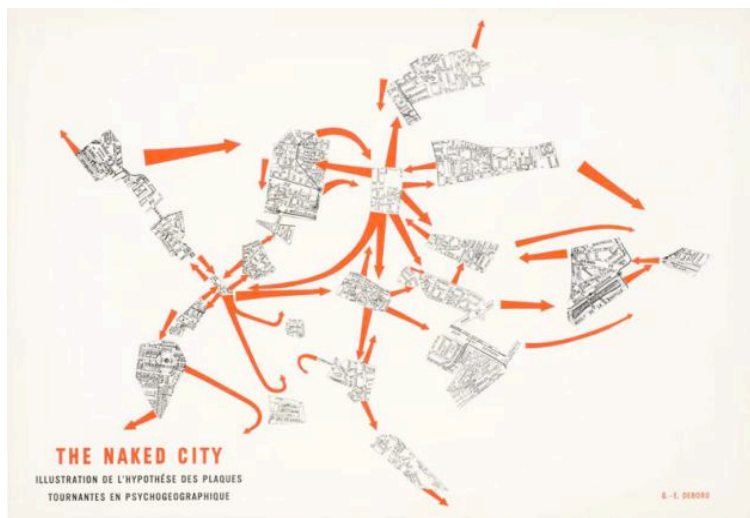


Figure 26: *The Naked City* (Guy Debord, 1957)

The city stands naked before us just as the Emperor in his new clothes, when it is no longer experienced through the all-seeing eye as something total, comprehensive and pre-defined as 'Paris' or 'Lisbon', etc. Perhaps it becomes more obvious, if we take as examples residential site names like *Lourenço Marques* (city), *Mount Everest* (mountain) or *Rhodesia* (country), since they represent the reference of general toponyms to the names of explorers and colonizers in the strict sense, which means, those places are, as a whole, ideologically interpellated by their very names. Google street view bears a surprising, unintended resemblance to the reassembled map *The naked City* by Guy Debord: namely, where the photographs of *Google street view* are no longer available, where the street ends in a virtual horizon, in a kind of nowhere, a twilight zone where the photographing car could not get any further. Here, suddenly, the room opens up again to our imagination, there is something undefined, invisible to this

beyond, a contingency, precisely because it is not covered or documented. In Google street view, there is a function to move onwards or backwards by clicking an icon in the street view application; where this icon no longer exists, we have a last image that serves as a reference for the ‘terra cognita’ in maps of the pre-Columbian era. After that last image, there is only ‘terra incognita’, which is a projection that exists exclusively in our imagination, and which is populated by mythical creatures (sea monsters, unicorns, etc.) that spring from the imagination, precisely for this reason (Fig. 27).



Figure 27: Map of the world in 1565 (detail)

### 11.3. The map as an instrument of political power

The map as media and the genre landscape have the same origins: the representations of territory in drawing or painting rarely aspired to be art; rather art was entirely reduced to serve politics of power and property. Cultural geographers, social historians and other scholars have examined the genres maps and landscapes as media; these studies made them realize how diverse our relations with the environment around us were. A study of the concept of landscape illustrates the diverse categories of political and economic interests, which are always present, when speaking about the city, the country, the nation or other habitats. The Dutch term ‘Landskip’ or German term ‘Landschaft’ have been recorded to the vocabulary in the sixteenth century for the purpose of administering collective irrigation and diking projects in the early modern political and economic systems of the Netherlands. Landschaft (landscape), as well as

the term *Gesellschaft* (society), defines a certain type of modern organization; a relationship between a local political institution and the territory is established in these cases. The term was first used to manifest ownership of land and a claim of a government on a territory. Only afterwards, the term was extended to the representations of landscape in prints and paintings. In the early modern Netherlands, these representations have served as a tool for the creation and preservation of a cohesion force in the civil population. Dutch engineers introduced landscape architecture in Great Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, first, to curb the moors of East Anglia, then came Dutch gardeners to design the estates of the English nobility in a new, streamlined fashion, which was based on rigorous geometrical order principles. Finally Dutch draftsmen and painters were recruited to produce images of the estates, either in a graphic format or a landscape painting. These representations were then exhibited in the central hall of the main building of the estate. In the age of Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), who believed that the supreme form of painting was to depict History in an allegorical painting, landscape painting was an administrative task. Under supervision of the state, these projects spread, initiated by the crown and nobility. Reynolds was the master of the ostentatious portrait style that was loved by the wealthy. His success was in part due to his ability to socialize with elite social circles in London. His paintings idealized the ruling classes and eternalized their prerogatives. In the process, landscape painting earned genre status, and by the end of the century, landscape was a public, even a political subject. When poets, playwrights, and painters were producing not commissioned works, rather images in their own right, landscape painting sometimes drew attention to the unpredictable social consequences, which were brought about with the demise of the commons. Enclosure, territorial war and mass expulsions were the consequences of the trend to treat landscape as a possession and a resource; hence, more landscape paintings transpired a critical undertone. Only in the late nineteenth century, the history of the spatial relations of man with his environment, mediated by the visual sense, began to draw interest as a historical research topic. The study of historical maps could serve as an investigation of the symbolism of power in cartography. The application of cartography in the modern social sciences had scholars and art historians alike looking for clues about the myth of continents and the origins of central bureaucracy. These early studies followed a not

necessarily firmly established program that searched for evidence how power structures could solidify in maps as well as in other texts. By reading maps against the grain, employing a parallax view, maps revealed prejudice and partisanship on behalf of the dominant powers. The picture of the world that is produced by the dominant power serves the interests of this power.

Today's maps have to be analyzed in the context of a set of conditions marked by specific technological ramifications or business models. Most route planners provide, just as social networks, highly standardized formats for the expression of individual travel - a contradiction in terms. The pre-figured features of these formats, for example in a GPS car application, are not congruent with the expressive and creative potential of people and ultimately function in a limiting way, thus leaving behind a sense of conforming to a pre-set structure. The question rarely asked is: why should I follow this route? In the case of social networks the question would be: for whom do we actually post something here? Somehow we imagine a kind of a prototype reader, but this reader is never concrete; we do it fundamentally for an anonymous audience. When we pray or send a message in a bottle, we basically direct our message to an unknown entity, something that could be entirely a product of our own imagination, our projection. As I have mentioned before, Jacques Lacan has labeled this anonymous entity the 'big Other'. The big Other is the first receiver of our Facebook posts and our prayers. The big Other materializes the anonymous field of society. It is an implicit point of reference for our thinking, speaking and acting. Lacan used an example that seems old-fashioned today, but it illuminates his point better than the postings on social media: it is the letter that will never be sent, but which reaches its destination, always. This letter contains a message to someone, but it seems too important or painful to actually confront the message with an actual receiver. However, is the message is written in the form of a letter and mostly, the letter is kept hidden somewhere in a drawer at home and this shows that the actual addressee was someone else. Even in the most intimate moments, the big Other can suddenly be present in the room and exert a subtle coercion. The big Other represents the symbolic order, the written and unwritten rules of society, its ideas and values, in other words, the ruling ideology, the super-ego. But this anonymous social field, the impersonal 'one' (as in 'it is done like that' or 'something one does not do') becomes tangible from time to time. It could be anything

that operates as an interiorized authority like a father, a teacher or a priest, but it could also be an imperative proliferated by advertisements or peer groups: Enjoy! Buy now! Get rich fast! etc.

Authority, in the guise of God and the *Ten commandments* can take the form of anything today, depending on the context - the rules and the values of society. In late capitalism, the classic institutions that make us feel guilty and thus exert a certain control over us, are in demise. The imperative of contemporary society can be summarized with the commandment to enjoy. Such commandment may include various aspects such as the imperative to succeed, to have a fulfilling sex live, to be a balanced person, to practice sports, to travel a lot, to enjoy music, to work hard and play hard, to pay attention to the environment, etc. The institution would then be the therapist, the cool friend, the successful entrepreneur etc., in short - the media. Consequently, the big Other is the institution for which our actions have to make sense. Hence, we look at the world and at our lives from the perspective of our own personal big Other. The compulsion of many today to reach for their cell phones in all kinds of mundane situations is thus not a symptom of the Internet generation. Instead it is rather something we always did, but unconsciously: we do not simply document our lives to have it approved by the big Other; rather we try to project and construct a coherent narrative of our life story. The big Other is the entity that structures all our relations. When we are with a friend or a lover, it is never simply the two of us alone, since there is always a mediator present. The big Other is this mediator who regulates the interaction. A good example of how this social mediator interpellates, is the question: Are you ashamed of me? Here, the perspective of a third party is introduced into a relationship between two people: the perspective of the symbolic order, the law. A different example for the big Other can be found in a situation where a group shares an open, but unspoken secret. Everyone knows about it, everyone knows that the others know it and yet nobody will pronounce it, to keep up appearances. Here, the big Other is the presumed clean conscience that allegedly knows nothing and is somehow 'blessed' with ignorance. Admitting the secret would put the identity of the group in question and that, in return, could change the dynamics of the group and put the group at risk. Usually those whistleblowers, which speak openly about a society's dirty little secrets, are expelled

from and punished by their respective societies. It follows that the big Other as a mediator functions as an *ersatz* bearer of (faith, guilt, shame, enjoyment, success, etc).

The mediator exists because he is our own projection and in turn, he subordinates and disciplines those who strive to live up to his imperatives. The big Other operates as a vicarious representative for us. We may actually believe more than we realize, and when we see Cádiz as Havana, we accept it, because our belief is not only suspended, but in fact, it is outsourced, projected upon the big Other. That is the point which any substitute location reveals: of course we do not believe that this is Havana. That would be naive. But perhaps the big Other believes it for us. The big Other believes as a substitute for us in the things that we are no longer able to believe in, but which are important for the narrative to not fall apart like a house of cards.

Media, in short, is the intersection of desires and imperatives of personal and societal projections, and although its technological restrictions may at times feel ridiculous, media ultimately confers identity and mediates social relations. The historical change marked by increasing mediatization of identity-related experiences, which were previously free of charge in the bedroom or on the street corner, lies in the decoupling of the physical body from a rather transcendental perception. Mediatization and commercialization of formerly everyday routine interactions is progressing at an unprecedented scale and thus becomes the new normal - the physical human being is in peril to be perceived as data - and treated accordingly.

## **Chapter Twelve: Simulacra**

### **12.1. *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998)**



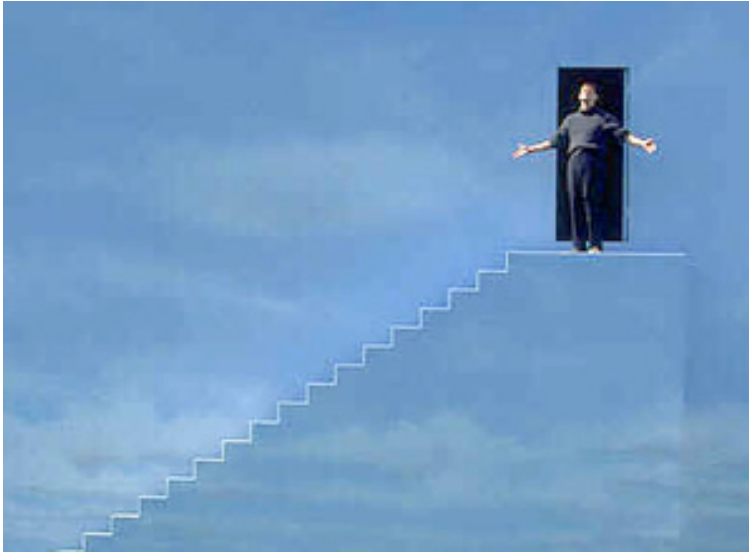


Figure 28: Film still from *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998)

*The Truman Show* (Fig. 28) displays a post-modern Potemkin village, to set off a process that could be labeled a truth procedure. The narrative shows a truth procedure as a personal experience, where the main character learns over time that he is being deceived and used for a TV reality show - at the end, he discovers the truth in a cathartic moment. The film as a whole can also be seen as a dialectical experiment in perception. The film is about a reality show, in which only the main character, Truman Burbank does not know that the small American town where he lives is an absolute simulacrum, including the residents of this town, which are, in fact, actors. We could imagine a version of the TV show, which does withhold the fact from the audience that Truman is the only non-actor in the show. The whole point of the show would then be missed because the audience would have to assume that all residents of the town, including Truman, are actors, just as in an ordinary movie. In this case, Truman could be classified as a diegetic element. The opposite version of this would be, if the town were not a studio set, but a real small town in the United States. In this case, the viewers would believe that nobody is acting, that all are real people and the result would be an ordinary documentary. However, Truman would still be a diegetic element in the narrative. In both cases, the suspense disappeared, since the whole concept of the show would be rendered invalid. Will he ever find out and how will he find out the truth? How he will react? These decisive questions that captivate the audience's attention would not even arise. In other words, the dramaturgy of the show is based solely on the

fact that the character Truman is an extra-diegetic element in it. This staged situation leads to a revelation, and it is exactly in these critical moments of confrontation, of a sort of clash between knowledge and truth, that we get some insight into the gap that opens up, when a universe starts to unravel. It could be the moment when a boy finds out, after sixteen years of growing up, that his brother is actually not his biological brother; that he is from a different father. Or a husband, to whom his wife says that she had a lover over the past eight years, etc.

The unreal feeling, that the persons who are confronted with these revelations, regularly describe, reflect a negation, actually a breaking point of reality, trauma, in the language of psychopathology. Trauma and its positive counterpart, the miracle, are often perceived as turning points in life, as they describe a situation of catharsis where a person is nevertheless required to abandon all their previous assumptions about their convictions and life in general is questioned. Often, a truth that is so obviously experienced as cruelty is not approved but rather repressed or displaced by many people. Repression and displacement are psychological defense mechanisms that do not only work on an individual but also on a collective level. The dictum of the ‘elephant in the room’ was coined to describe a situation where obvious facts are ignored or denied, and sometimes downright ousted on a collective level.

## 12.2. Extra-diegetic elements

When watching a fiction film, we do not want to permanently analyze if and how the depicted situations match with reality. After all, we went to see a movie in a cinema to escape the mundane reality of everyday life. The problem is not so much that movies have nothing to do with reality, but rather, that we once again get into a dilemma of false opposites, where we do believe, that once we have stepped out of the movie theatre, we do not have to deal with simulacra, but only with reality. Therefore, the presence of extra-diegetic elements in the fictional world of a movie, or even in the realistic world of a documentary, are appropriate means, to be able to reconsider evaluate the relation between film and reality. In other words, as soon as I notice that a movie is saturated with music in a way that I cannot find in the reality of everyday life, I have two options to soften the line between film and reality: I can either turn off the

soundtrack of the film or, in everyday life use a set of headphones to change the original soundtrack of my direct environment. I have thus subverted the point of view imposed on me.

Self-reflexive films such as the *Truman Show* deal with the apparent omnipotence of media in a satiric fashion by dissecting the format of reality television and playing with unreflected notions of cinematic reality and the role of music in their construction. The film shows how extra-diegetic music works in the same way for the audience as the non-actor Truman functions for the audience of the show. Truman's reality is, at the same time, something real and true for him, but something completely different - artificial and entertaining - for the audience, since the godlike creator of the show can control even the weather in the small town. The atmospheric music that the audience of the show gets to hear is mixed into the soundtrack; a soundtrack that Truman himself is not able to hear. The true nature of his fake reality only becomes apparent to him when, in the last scene, he discovers that there is an exit door in the painted studio wall - this image stands metaphorically for all beings who are trapped in a matrix, an ideology, a system -without knowing that their reality has been made up entirely by a fraudulent (or benevolent, which is not important here) spirit. What are the effects of this change in perspective with regard to the perspective with which we perceive a movie, or our everyday world?

In the case of the soundtrack, the characters that populate the narrative universe would suddenly be able to hear the background music of the film itself. They would have an understanding of how their actions were emotionally charged, sometimes perhaps ridiculed. This change in perspective would re-direct the attention to the medium itself, in the sense of a alienation effect à la Brecht: the medium would reveal its invisible, interpretive and manipulative power. It may trigger a certain level of cognitive dissonance in the audience, perhaps they would wonder what role was intended for the audience as an audience within the media logic.

Again, it is not the purpose of this exercise to abandon the idea of cinema as a realistic medium, but rather to promote a novel perception of reality as a construction, which shows many cracks. I dare to believe that this would in fact make cinema a more realistic medium. Often, the shifting ratio of diegetic and extra-diegetic elements

happens along a continuous axis, where music or other elements, such as text, comment, etc. can occur at various points, and sometimes these elements slide during the film from one end of the axis to the other end. If we assume that there are more separate levels of narration in addition to the plot of the film, it is particularly intriguing when a diegetic element of a movie transforms into an extra-diegetic one, because it precisely opens up the spaces between the plot, the narrative and the meta-level of interpretation and of commentary and self-reflection. It is only then that the constructedness of fiction is laid bare, the cinematic universe comes to its end, and meaning transgresses into reality. Could this be the point where truth is to be found? While there is the invariance of a truth, it might, however, not be visible in reality. Because a truth is everywhere and always available, it exists unnoticed, unless there is a loophole in the laws of appearance and reality, where truth turns into a question and is visible only for a fleeting moment.

### 12.3. The instrumentalization of the gaze

A classic example of a substitute location from pre-audiovisual times would be the Potemkin village. The term Potemkin village was originally used to describe something that was built solely to impress someone, or to deceive him into thinking that what he saw was real. The expression is now typically used in politics and economics and stands for any literal or figurative construction, which was only built to convince others that a situation is better than it actually is. However, the Potemkin village, in order to serve its purpose, had to be built in a particular manner: it had to appear authentic from the perspective of the visiting Russian Empress. Only certain power structures provide the means and the justifications to construct this deceitful mirage. Any illusionist, who works in the entertainment industry, is aware of the fact that a trick must divert the attention of the audience to a different point of focus, in order for the magic to work: the audience is then generally conditioned - their superficial perspective is not capable to perceive what is really going on, since they see the action only from a certain distance, or from a certain angle, or only for a short time, etc. This prerequisite alone is important to make the audience feel confident at any time from the outset and to confirm from time to time their cognitive expectations, which are shaped by specific

habits of seeing and learning. The element of surprise is all the bigger, if the audience had all their cognitive expectations confirmed beforehand (the empty box which suddenly contains a living rabbit, etc.)

Today, our gaze has adapted to the photographic machine, in a kind of anti-mimesis, just as workers in a factory have become extensions of the assembly line. Due to the repetitive actions of the machine, their own behavior is conditioned. The workers begin to replicate those actions; as a result, they will become like machines and, as soon as possible, will be replaced by more machines. The gaze is not fundamentally different: media consumers in general will adapt and interiorize the perspectives perpetuated by the media. One example for the conditioning gaze is the police photograph of a criminal suspect, also known as ‘mugshot’. I’ve chosen a mugshot depicting Martin Luther King, Jr. (Fig. 29), because in 2011 a Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., was dedicated to this civil rights activist. His case illuminates drastically how the public perception of one and the same man can change over time.

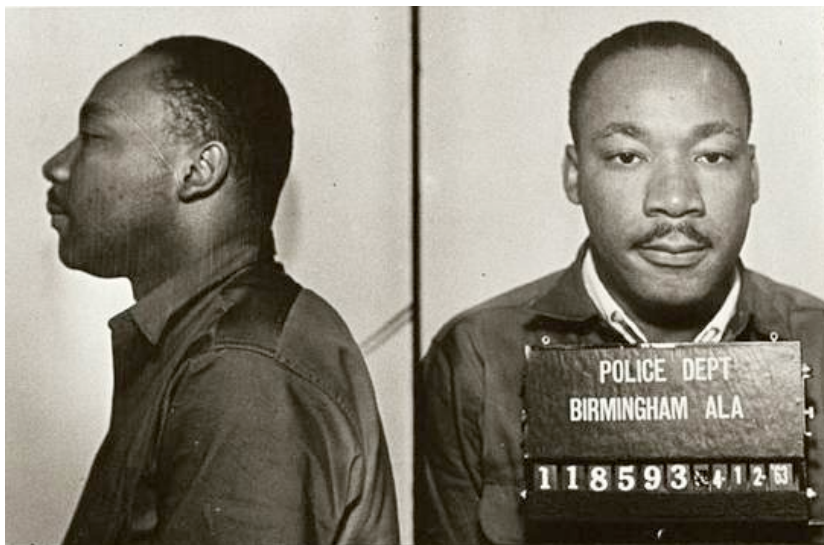


Figure 29: Mugshot of Martin Luther King, Jr. following his 1963 arrest in Birmingham, Alabama

The pictures of suspects, which are made in a police station, signal the viewer from the outset that the depicted person is an offender, even if that is not actually or legally the case. However, these images are made with a purpose, and, much like a photograph of a car is supposed to advertise the car, these images are instrumentalized. The mug shot is used to find and catch suspected terrorists or fugitives, but it also serves

for an example of the perils that reside in a fully mediated, technocratic image of a complex reality. An extreme form of this type of instrumentalization has been attempted by the Nazi propaganda film *The Jewish Peril* (*Der ewige Jude*, Fritz Hippler, 1941) that produced a perspective on Germany's Jewish population as a sort of pest that should be exterminated.



Figure 30: Film still from *The Jewish Peril* (Fritz Hippler, 1940)

Media is thus an instrument for the conditioning of perception, and *Der ewige Jude* (Fig. 30) served as a precursor to the actual extermination of the Jews. Once something is widely perceived as a pest, it may be destroyed with a clear conscience and no feelings of guilt. Any rat, roach or mosquito will ever be capable to shake off this stigma; only if we questioned our own projection, our own gaze, will we become able again to see regular animals, not pests. As a result of this policy of perception, media has imposed categories and values on us, such as of women as mindless sex objects, of Muslims as potential suicide bombers, on Gypsies as thieves, etc. In order to renounce this pre-set gaze and get back to a dialectics of seeing, we have to acknowledge that images are now ubiquitous, and photography or film do no longer carry any revolutionary potential qua innovative technology. However, they do carry a mimetic potential; not caused by the power of the original and its aura, but rather because they function as a desirable ideal, or as *phantasmagoria*. The ultimate example of an instrumentalized gaze is the way we perceive money. If we lose our ability to question the origin or the destination of money, then money will become an absolute

value. Whether the money has been stolen or whether it is destined to finance a war: the context of money would become totally irrelevant. Again with Lacan, this would mean that we enter a state of psychotic immersion, because the critical distance between the symbolic order and the Real will disappear. Money, which is supposed to symbolically represent a certain value, then gains absolute power.

## Chapter Thirteen: The dominant symbolic order - the law

### 13.1. *The Coral Reef* (Mike Nelson, 2000)



Figure 31: Detail from *The Coral Reef* (Mike Nelson, 2000)

British Artist Mike Nelson has constructed a subterranean labyrinth called *The Coral Reef* (Fig. 31), which symptomizes the attempt to reformulate the dichotomy distance/immersion. Instead of putting his work on display in a conventional museum or gallery setting, Nelson makes the spectator leave the venue and enter a parallel world that is eerily real and unreal at the same time. The feeling of disorientation almost instantly overwhelms and is only matched by the arguably greater sense of cultural dislocation. In this network of fifteen interconnecting, claustrophobic rooms, the viewers find themselves in the position of both intruder and detective, piecing together clues with an uneasy sense of trespass. It is a warren of shabby, inhospitable spaces that have an air of recent abandonment, whose contents offer hints to the identities of absent inhabitants. In this version of a substitute location, the inversion of the *Truman Show*

set-up takes hold: Truman believes that he is living a normal life and only from time to time doubts or questions the truthfulness of his habitat. In the *Coral Reef*, the viewer enters an artificial surrounding (in classic terms, Nelson's work is considered installation, but to me, it is more like an immersive narrative) and soon feels that this could be more real than anything else, especially given the contrast to the rest of the museum or gallery space that he has left only minutes ago. Walter Benjamin would have claimed that we have now left the dream of the arcades, or, in this case, the museum. We have entered the outside of the dream, the space that is necessary to supplement the dream. As the viewer explores the installation, it becomes clear, that very distinct, sometimes conflicting ideologies or systems of belief exist side by side. The absent, but implied occupants of Nelson's work appear to be transients or outsiders who only have in common that they exist outside the political and economic margins of globalized capitalist society. Each room suggests multiple narrative possibilities, but these never resolve into anything fully defined. Instead, one is confronted by a continually shifting matrix of relationships. The work's title alludes to this collection of complex, fragile belief systems that form a substrata (just like a coral reef) beneath the 'ocean surface' of global western capitalism.

*The Coral Reef* could be best described as an experiment in cognitivism and narrative distortion. In science, experiments are made to test theories and presumptions about materials. When materials are tested in extreme conditions the robust materials – as well as the theories – survive while the weaker ones are strained to the point of breaking down. A work like *The Coral Reef* puts its own audience to a test, to see how they respond to its twisted narrative. *The Coral Reef* can be compared to one of those flashback films that rely on remembering and retelling something from a different angle. I suppose that any theory of the spectator's activity and response should always rest upon a general theory of perception and cognition. Instead of emphasizing the viewer's ideologically coded or psychologically unconscious responses to projected images, cognitivists instead want to analyze comprehension in terms of the viewers' ordinary, real-world psychological processes and strategies for solving problems. They seek to understand the basics of human thought, emotion, and action by appeal to naturalistic processes of mental representation and a common sense of rational agency.

*The Coral Reef* experiment first and foremost makes clear that walking along a



given path with a pre-defined itinerary is structured like viewing narrative films and it consists of the same sorts of top-down (inferring and conceptualizing) and bottom-up (data-driven, automatic, sensory) psychological processes that viewers use to understand the world and the events around them, constructed or not.

Mainstream films that seek success at the box-office usually employ classical continuity editing. Smooth transitions introduce the spectator to the plot and the protagonists, and, from a cognitive point of view, the logic of conflict and resolution is rarely put into question. These films present seamlessly edited narrative structures: a beginning, middle and end where flashbacks are clearly indicated as such and are at both ends directly related to the narrative. As Christian Metz says, “a narrative is not a sequence of closed events, but a closed sequence of events.” (Metz, 1974: 24) Films that run counter to these principles are typically and deliberately less immersive due to breaks in the diegesis. They are often labeled as disturbing or difficult to watch. Any film that seeks to be a popular success has to capture the general audience, and not just the critic; some unconventional films manage to seduce the audience to enjoy the process of disentangling complicated narratives. Contrary to ambivalent films that are open for multiple interpretations, these films challenge the audience to solve the cognitive problems they pose, just like a crossword puzzle or a maze would. Apparently conventional, linear narratives are sometimes distorted in last-minute twists that completely alter our understanding of what we have been watching, so we have to re-frame it. This is exactly what happens in *The Coral Reef*. At some point, after having explored more than ten different rooms, the viewer enters a room that he identifies immediately as the first room of the installation. Our cognitive perception tells us that we have now completed a full circle and it would seem logical that upon leaving this room we will exit the entire setting, through the same door that we came in. But this does not happen and instead, we find ourselves in a room that could or could not be part of the installation. It looks like a storage room of the museum, a room designed to instill the disorienting feeling that we have taken a wrong exit. This trick shows also that by interpreting films in mere intellectual or dramaturgical ways might not hit the mark because the preference for the ‘textual’ dimension of a film does not take into account the cognitive point of view.

Any element of the narrative universe should be defined in terms of its effects on

the spectator's mind - on attention, memory, imagination, and emotions. The absence of inhabitants in *The Coral Reef* actually makes their implicit presence almost palpable. Looked at this way, all narratives function in a broader context: by stimulating the spectator's attention and by tapping his reservoirs of memory, narratives make the spectator perform specific imaginative acts. Cognitivism must elucidate these mental processes, which, again, are not of intellectual or poetic nature, but rather happen on a visceral level, just as in the before mentioned 'Eureka' moment, or in the 'lighting flash' of an arrested movement: any truth procedure can only start at this point. The circumstances surrounding our eventual realization of the truth help explain our enjoyment of the process. *The Coral Reef*, like many other artworks and films, can be enjoyed and understood, even when the viewer is not able to make complete sense of the whole. It has a complex layering and if *The Coral Reef* had been presented as a novel, nobody would have expressed any surprise at its unusual structure; novelists perform these tricks all the time. We can assume that Nelson has planned *The Coral Reef* with every intention of allowing it to be re-experienced for further discoveries and interpretations. It is certainly true that it is packed with references to many other semiotic universes and much of its content cannot be grasped on a first viewing, nor is a single viewing sufficient to enjoy all the narrative layers. Just many novels require a non-linear reading, including going back in the chronology of the text to re-read parts which only make sense in the light of later chapters, so *The Coral Reef* demands repeated experiencing by revealing more of its structure. A first viewing only allows for a fragmented understanding of the installation's complex layering of references and clues, but this does not spoil the experience of the spectator, rather the reverse is likely to be true. It is by stimulating our memory, attention and imagination that *The Coral Reef* makes its complexity the reason for the spectator's enjoyment. Such narrative complexity reveals a lack of closure that can only be explained in terms of the challenge that further viewings and deliberation will actually bring disclosure and make things clearer. By letting audiences solving a riddle, the voice of the author draws on the reflexive criticism and on the appreciation of being immersed, but not overwhelmed. It is the role of the detective that lets us walk in the shoes of the criminal, while being morally at a distance from him. This twofold act of immersion and distancing is thought to transgress a fundamental rule of classic post-production, which only seeks to draw

the spectator in, in order to seduce and overwhelm him.

In real life stories or biographies, the plethora of potential futures is usually been trimmed back to a level that is cognitively manageable, with regard to dramaturgy in literature or cinematic storytelling. A biography is written in hindsight, and it seeks out a few paths from many possible paths, which are not equal. The one path that can instill a sense of closure and satisfaction we like to feel at the end may not be the last one taken, or completed, but it is often the least hypothetical one. Again, spectators usually refuse to bear the responsibility to choose from multiple-draft narratives because this runs counter to the ethical function of a narrative. Spectators want to know which path the hero has taken to be able to emulate him. In any story, the last version of various options presents itself always as the fullest, most satisfying one. This conforms to our propensity to interpret the ending as an absolute verdict, to treat it as the culmination of all that went before it - even if all of what went before was very unlikely or impossible to have come before. Authors employ the psychology of everyday routines and of common sense in order to introduce the reader into the universe of their narrative and throughout a story, readers are given the possibility to 'anchor' their own experience, which could be crucial in comprehending a narrative. Artists also employ this psychology against an audience, when it is important that something should be not clear or fully understood during the unfolding of the plot (e.g., to create suspense or visceral shock, as in Hitchcock's *Psycho*), or when the audience must understand something in a new way (e.g., as a metaphor or through a sudden revelation, as in Billy Wilder's *Witness for the prosecution*, where Marlene Dietrich stuns the courtroom by giving an equally chilling and damaging testimony against her husband), or when something disturbing or traumatic must be reconfigured or repressed by the narrative. Any audience can be mistaken, because they are constantly making assumptions and conjectures. Human beings are very systematic in drawing false conclusions and wrong inferences and artists like Mike Nelson can rely on that.

However, in *The Coral Reef* the user is trapped in a prefigured itinerary, and he does not know if this imposed tunnel vision, this inescapable subjectivity, will lead him to a point of redemption. What happens to us when we enter the last room of *The Coral Reef* is a visceral shock because our cognitive agency has been rendered ineffective. In a literal sense, we have been incorporated in the narrative; we have been imbedded in it

and from now on, we are at the mercy of the author. I believe that any procedure of brainwashing must start out with this kind of visceral shock.

The film *The Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947) uses a subjective camera throughout, thereby reproducing the point of view of the main character: the only time we see the hero is when he looks at his reflection in a mirror. (Fig. 32)



Figure 32: Film still from *The Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947)

This technique might lead us to deduce that an audience would experience a strong sense of identification, but rather the opposite seemed to be the case. Spectators at the time found the experience oppressive and disempowering and herein *The Lady in the Lake* bears some similarities with *The Coral Reef*. Torben Grodal remarks:

The whole film, except the narrator sequences, is shot using 'subjective camera'; the effect, however, is not an intense 'subjective' identification with the protagonist but, on the contrary, a feeling of alienation, because there is no objective model, a body, on whom to anchor feelings of identification (and there are not - as in real life - any body-sensations to anchor the objective model of the self). The 'subjective' camera view cannot therefore be experienced with complete cognitive and emphatic identification by the viewer: it is experienced as the view of an alien. (Grodal, 1997: 115)

It is rather the sensation of being paralyzed, not unlike somebody who is tied to a wheelchair and pushed around by people he cannot fully trust. Therefore, the viewer cannot experience the subjective camera view with cognitive and emphatic identification; it is experienced as the view of a remote controlled body which is ours but which we cannot control, which is dissociated from us. In *The Coral Reef*, the rather

pleasant sensation of ‘inter-passivity’, of being represented vicariously by an idealized hero (a good-looking, physically attractive Hollywood actor who fights evildoers), the enjoyment of experiencing everything through the eyes and the mind of the other, is not granted to us. Instead, we have to move physically through a potentially hostile environment on a predetermined path.

When watching a film, we imagine ourselves directly related to the characters and events of the story. We are cognitively focused, interested in and concerned about the characters and events. In a narrative, it can always happen that a hero actually follows through on his desires, acts out, and thus also learns to live with the consequences, good or bad, of his desires. The consumer, staring at a screen device, can only admit that he identifies with this hero, but his actions are foreclosed. This means, that the screen makes us have desires in the first place. It tells us, on the occasion, what to desire, but essentially, we purchase a ticket to enter a movie theatre in order to desire.

The films of Michael Haneke take a different path to leave audiences perplexed, demoralized and resentful because in many cases, viewers are forced against their will to identify with brutal murderers or rapists and in the end they are not granted what they secretly hoped for: a happy ending. Imagining is founded upon the concept that people use their own mind to correlate something to the mind of another: hence we have to constantly decide if we agree and go along with the hero in the narrative construction, or if we rather prefer to stay at a distance and be critical of what he does. The narratives of either movies or reality organize not just memory, but the whole spectrum of human experience, including dreams and visceral trauma. Narrative is an instrument of the mind that helps us collectively constructing our notion of reality; a ‘meaningful’ experience of life can only take hold when we interact with it as a collective, ongoing story that is intertwined with our own, individual story.

Precisely here resides a possible understanding of mimesis: as a means to assimilate, whereby we do not only shape ourselves after a model, but also by integrating the model into our world - for example, through the use of a medium. By means of this intervention, we can produce a new object, be it a concrete film or photograph - and mimesis lets us understand how the photographic representation of a person can serve to be the mechanism of identification with that person.

Mimesis here should not be understood in the terms used, say, by Plato, as simple 'imitation'. Rather mimesis in Adorno, as indeed in Walter Benjamin's writings, is a psychoanalytic term - taken from Freud - that refers to a creative engagement with an object. Freud writes about the term in the context of jokes. Mimesis is ideational. It operates through the medium of the idea, and is what allows one to empathize with the subject of a joke. In listening to the tale about the unfortunate individual who slips up on a banana skin, one puts oneself in the position of that individual, and imagines oneself also slipping up, drawing upon memories of similar experiences. One thereby identifies with that individual. But the implications of the term extend beyond empathizing with the subject of a joke. Mimesis is a term, as Freud himself predicted, of great potential significance for aesthetics. (Leach, 2000)

### 13.2. The hidden supplement of the law and the taboo

Zizek says that every law has a perverse core. The possibility of its transgression is a feature of any law. The actions that we deem resistant have been domesticated and made part of this built-in, temporary suspension. The Carnival in the middle ages had such a function. During Carnival, people could, for a few days, break the symbolic boundaries and hierarchies were suspended; this also ensured that people during lent had actually some sins to make up for. The Carnival as a suspension of social order is a proper loophole of a system of morals, which is needed to maintain order. In the same line, brothels often function as a supplement to the bourgeois marriage. "In the perverse functioning of Christianity, religion is, in effect, evoked as a safeguard allowing us to enjoy life with impunity. The impression that we don't have to pay the price is of course misleading here: in effect, the price we pay is desire itself - that is to say, in succumbing to this perverse call, we compromise our desire." (Zizek, 2003: 49)

A law establishes rules, but it produces also unwritten rules to regulate the handling of the official rules. Hence, it is often the marginal, the outsider, who dutifully tries to respect the law, and waits at every traffic light etc. Who is really an integral part of society, knows exactly when he can break the rules, and when he must break them. The paternal authority works best when it deliberately looks away in certain situations and leaves open spaces for the children for a controlled transgression. Any authority that does not create these pockets of lawless freedom is doomed to be overturned sooner or later. The example of the father makes also clear that the worst outcome of a too strict handling of the law was patricide. A revolution, a proper destruction of a government or a dictatorship has its counterpart in patricide, which sets it radically apart

from the system-inherent reformation, because these reforms remain mostly in the context of what they pretend to exceed, and thus confirm the law rather than undermining it. In our postmodern age, going against taboos is already part of the hedonist consumption system.

This is especially true in late capitalism, where the pushing of boundaries has become an integral part of the value creation and the consumption process. It has become the hallmark of contemporary art to disrespect taboos and put transgression and provocation at its core, in an apparent joyful play of social norms and ethics. However, these simulated transgressions change absolutely nothing with regard to existing social conditions. This only confirms the fundamental notion that art functions as a substitute (*ersatz*), which is intimately linked to the motif of ‘vicarious representation’ in the founding myths of Christianity, where sacramental bread represents the body and wine the blood of Christ, etc. A further shift in perception came with the age of mechanical reproduction, when the accent of an artworks cult value was completely replaced by its exhibition value; the status as a work of art gained a dialectical dynamics, since, on the one hand, through the mass distribution of copies, many people knew of the existence and the importance of the artwork, which made the original in its uniqueness more valuable. In the ongoing era of counterfeit and authenticity certificates, millions of dollars are paid for works of art that do no longer radiate any cult value. The variety of methods of technical reproduction of artworks increased their fitness for exhibition, however, this circumstance resulted in a qualitative transformation of its nature: a two-pronged quantitative shift between two polarities, original and copy. If the cult value of the artwork has become invalid today, we might locate the *ersatz* character of the artwork, aimed at the establishment of taboos (laws, prohibitions, etc.) today in the media. Media assumes its role of the super-ego but, at the same time, they provide the space for pleasurable transgression. It is pleasurable, because here, transgression does not yield any actual contingency; it is devoid of its inherent dangerous, even life-threatening side. The dark or perverse side of the transgression delegated to a playful simulation; where there had been terror, now there is thrill. Today, even young children can kill avatars in simulation games, adults dress up in knight's armor to simulate sword fights, and there are harmless sexual games of submission and violation à la *Fifty shades of gray* on every street corner. Religion has painstakingly enforced laws and

taboos - mechanisms to repress dark desires and drives – but now they are simply acted out, albeit in a sanitized form. As a result of this development, in societies where life is regulated by rigid religious dogma, more children are being born and more people are sentenced to death than in those hedonistic societies that have abandoned religion but instead prefer to make abortive and simulated inconsequential transgressions their way of life. However, many people indeed adopt a social identity as their own that mass media codes had offered them in the first place, which is not to say that all users necessarily do accept such codes. Whenever those involved in the communication process do not share common codes and social positions, de-codings do not turn out the way the encoders had intended. Since media content is broadcast to heterogeneous audiences, diverse de-codings of such content are unavoidable.

Capitalist utopia, following Walter Benjamin's definition of the arcade as a dream that has no outside, is today a gated community, where people live with plenty without having to work hard, while enjoying safety, peace and harmony. Violent impulses are repressed and delegated to a world outside and beyond. Violence takes place on the screen, which functions as an imaginary hymen, protecting the spectator from in the violence it simultaneously reveals and conceals. From time to time, the violence seeks an embodiment and fiction spills over and becomes reality. Every parent knows that young children, after having watched a pirate movie, enact and imitate what they have just seen. The sofa in the living room turns into a ship ready for assault. The entertainment industry is well aware of the limitations of mere transcendental screen experiences and is seeking to create enveloping, wraparound, full-body stimulations. Steven Spielberg: "as long as we're looking at a square, whether it's a movie screen or whether it's a computer screen, we're never going to be totally immersive. We've got to get rid of that and put the player inside the experience, where no matter where you look you're surrounded by a three-dimensional experience. That's the future." (Atkinson, 2014: 3)

Most people treat screens as windows (as in the software brand name commercialized by Bill Gates' Microsoft corporation), but more and more not only in the entertainment business they are understood as a barrier. Those who use media as viewers and players are dissatisfied because they feel that the screen prevents them from being fully, actively engaged in their worlds. Spielberg's remark leaves no doubt that



the disembodied mode of entertainment will soon be a thing of the past. However, the idea of immersive entertainment, in which one can lose oneself and in which the line between fiction and reality blurs, is not new at all, and it is by no means a simple question of technological innovation. The title character in Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's (1547-1616) 17th-century satire *Don Quixote* went fighting windmills that he imagined to be giants, because he had immersed himself in the practice of reading and the result was disorienting: "He read all night from sundown to dawn, and all day from sunrise to dusk until with virtually no sleep and so much reading he dried out his brain and lost his sanity." (Cervantes, 2004) Quixote's madness and his loss of a sense of reality suggests that, apart from a seductive and overwhelming immersive quality of art in general and reading in particular, there has to be a certain mental disposition as well to derange one's faculties and to go 'tilting at windmills', which is but one form of 'acting out' in modern psychological parlance.

### 13.3. Coming back from media space - a nightmare

A contemporary example for this type of 'acting out' would be the Aurora shooting, where a young man, dressed up as the 'Joker', a character from the Batman superhero universe, killed twelve people and injured 58 others while they were watching the premiere of the movie *Batman – The dark knight returns*. Naturally, one would claim that the man is a psychopath who went on a rampage. The fact that he did this in a movie theater dressed as Batman's evil antagonist may seem like a coincidence, but the case reveals a more complex bigger picture, because the very marketing campaign for the first Batman movie *The dark knight* did everything to make their target group feel like they were part of the movie and the whole plot had invaded their real lives.

One day toward the end of 2007, several thousand people received a cryptic and, it must be said, highly inappropriate email from [humanresources@whysoserious.com](mailto:humanresources@whysoserious.com). The email read, "Heads up, clown! Tomorrow means that there's one last shifty step left in the interview process: Arwoeufgryo." The people who got this missive had applied to serve as henchmen of Batman's perpetual nemesis, the Joker. Some recipients—the savvy ones—realized they had just gotten a tip-off to go to [www.whysoserious.com/steprightup](http://www.whysoserious.com/steprightup) ("arwoeufgryo" shifted one letter over on the keyboard). There they found a carnival game in which a series of ratty-looking stuffed animals appeared a few at a time, each with a different street address pinned to its belly. Since Whysoserious.com was known to be associated with weird occurrences involving the upcoming Batman movie *The Dark*

Knight, word of the new Web page quickly spread among those who gravitated to online discussion forums about the film. There they learned from those who had googled the addresses that each one was for a bakery. A note on the Whysoserious.com carnival game bore instructions to go to each address and pick up a “very special treat” that was being held for someone named Robin Banks. The race was on. In Boston, a local couple and a friend from the Netherlands went to an address on Salem Street in the North End and found themselves at an old-fashioned Italian American pastry shop. It was empty except for a handful of employees. When they announced they were there to pick up a package, they were met with a curt response. ‘Name?’ ‘Robin Banks.’ They were given a box. Opening it, they found a cake inside. Written on top in lurid purple and green icing was a phone number and the words ‘Call Me Now.’ So they called—and the cake started ringing. Borrowing a knife from the bakery, they cut into the cake and found a sealed evidence pouch inside. The pouch contained a cell phone, a charger, and a note with instructions to call another number—which in turn triggered a text message to keep the phone turned on and charged at all times. Also in the pouch was a single playing card—a joker. To anyone attuned to the mythology of Batman, the message was clear: from now on they were accomplices of the Joker. (Rose, 2011: 9-10)

The whole marketing build-up went on through various stages and ended at the opening of the movie in a theatre. Every viewer of the *Batman* sequel would agree that Batman may have been the hero, but the Joker was the star of the movie.

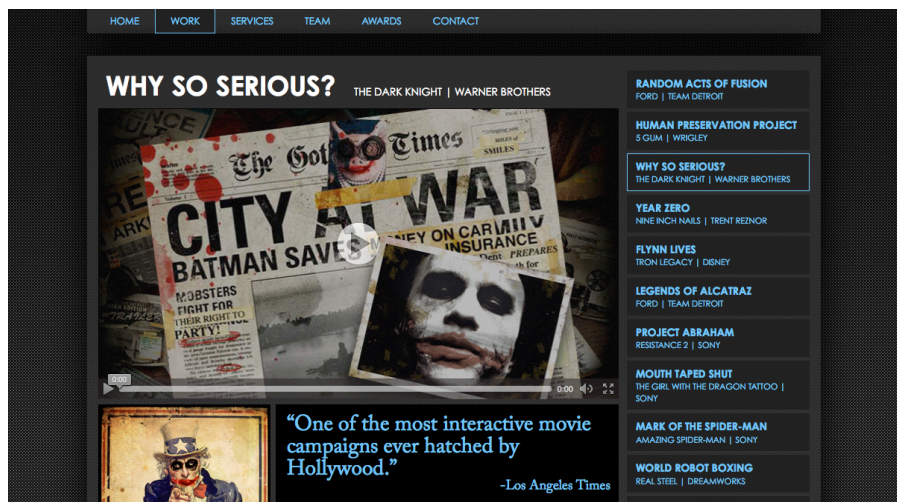


Figure 33: Screen shot of the *whysoserious* website

The number of references to the Joker on the whysoserious.com website (Fig. 33) and the complete lack of reference to anything Batman said or did are evidence enough.

The Aurora Killer James Holmes had planned the massacre meticulously. He even prepared his apartment for the aftermath of the murders with deadly traps, using

explosives that would detonate as soon as the police entered to search for evidence. Holmes calculated every minor detail in order to inflict the maximum damage and a huge amount of casualties. Not only his dress and the orange dyed hair but also his use of gas canisters and the booby-trapped apartment are explicit references to the evil proceedings that the Joker usually employs in the *Batman* movies. Furthermore, there were reports that when he was jailed, Holmes still acted like the Joker: he even told the police after the massacre in Aurora that he was Batman's enemy and once in prison, he would spit at the guards. One prison insider said of the killer who was held in solitary confinement to prevent revenge and/or suicide that Holmes thinks he's acting in a movie. The Joker also inspired Holmes's answering machine message.

The problem is not the portrayal per se, but a culture that extends deliberately the film's diegesis into real life. This can be fun to watch when in *The purple rose of Cairo* a guy steps from the screen into the movie theatre to kiss Mia Farrow, but becomes questionable in the case of brutal homicides or rapes that were inspired by movies. The marketing campaign for the Batman sequel clearly intended to draw people actively into this substitute location, to immerse them with all its suggestive might. As the case of the Aurora massacre and other killings inspired by movies show, *The Coral Reef* was prophetic: it even features a Joker mask and a machine gun as props sitting side by side on a desk. The killer imitating the Joker can be seen as just another lost soul - like the boy in Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero*, easily drawn into the seemingly fascinating, evil yet glorified diegetic universes.

Here, my investigation comes full circle. Today's glorified culture is based on consumption and hollow fun. Today's worthless lives are the poor and the underachievers. Fascism and ideologies of superiority in general assert that the existence of nations and races deemed superior can be justified by natural selection and they often resort to the presumption that evolution itself is nothing but a progressive entanglement of lower tier elements to higher tier systems, with synergetic overall gains at cost of loss of freedom for the lower tier elements (particles entangle to atoms, atoms to molecules, molecules to cells, cells to biological organism, biological organisms to social organisms). According to that view, the social constructs (social organisms formed by ideas and organizations) are relentlessly aiming at their synergetic self-optimization, by an increased uniformization and parameterization of the human

individual. To a moderate extent this delivers the blessing of civilization, in excess, it becomes a nightmare. The progress toward excessive self-optimization of social constructs must be curtailed, because the individual needs to preserve a minimum level of unbridled complexity inherent to his biological lower tier order to continue to be human and not to become a robot, avatar or a streamlined parameter made out of datasets, whose new habitat would be media space, which is at the same time his own projection and a thoroughly uninhabitable substitute location.

### Summary Part III

In the third part, I have raised the question if media space, in my own terminology substitute location, is actually habitable. What happens if the anti-mimetic reversal of perception comes full circle? With some examples from the fields of entertainment, particularly from audiovisual entertainment, I sought to exemplify how substitute locations function, what type of perception they require, how thoroughly uninhabitable they are. Media space offers absorption by behavior that makes us forget ourselves. However, no one's desire is completely autonomous. The body remains on the outside of media space and it doesn't really know what is happening on the inside of this space. Operating from false consciousness means that we believe our conscious self could be sufficient to form an identity. Trying to form an identity in media space is like trying to invent a language (a universal language, based on audio-visuality) that everyone else can speak: everyone, except our own bodies. In the course of this analysis, it should become clear, that a distinct perception is needed to defy and counter the subtle layers of imposed corporate absorption in the media, to take away the abortive effects and their deceptive power.

## PART IV: THE OBJECT – *A ROAD MOVIE*

### Chapter Fourteen: Constructing the Dialectical Image

#### 14.1. Project: a road with the name - *Rua Ricardo Chibanga*

The practical part of my thesis is a documentary, made for the Portuguese public broadcaster RTP (Rádio e Televisão de Portugal), released on September 26, 2012. The title of the film is *Chibanga – o primeiro matador africano da História*, produced by Nanook in 2011, duration: 52 minutes, color and black/white, written and directed by Thomas Behrens (Fig. 34)

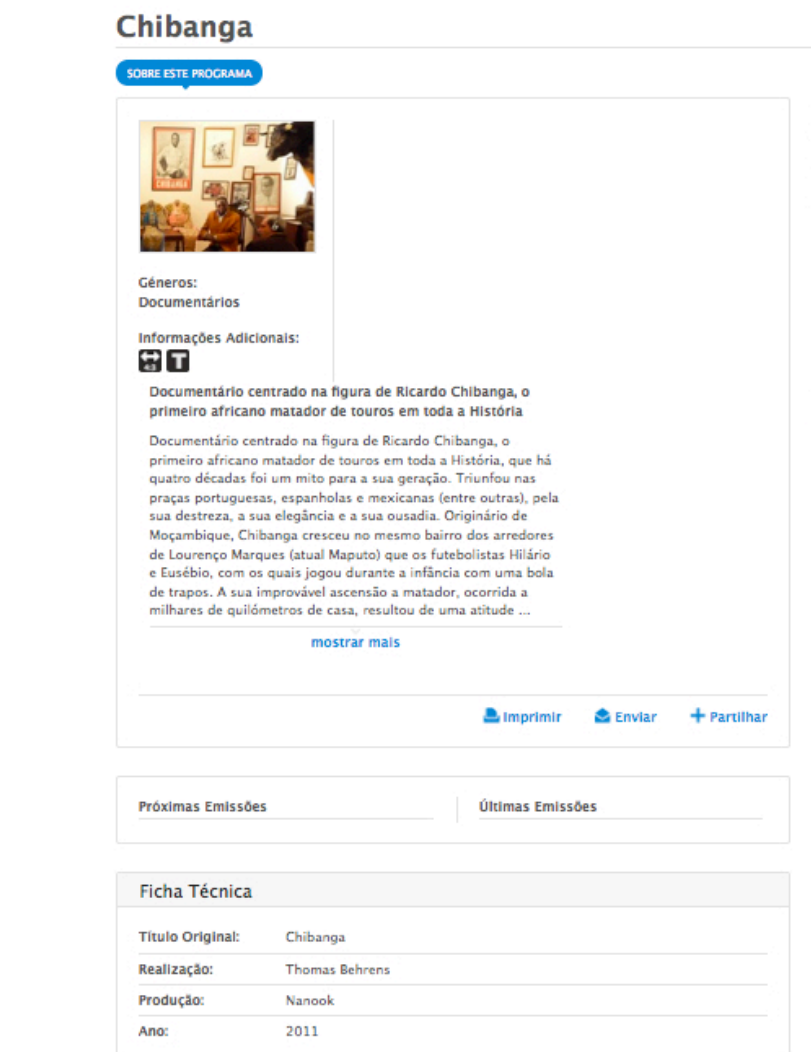


Figure 34: Screen shot of the RTP website (Chibanga)

If, as Benjamin asserts, the dialectical image is a caesura in the movement of thought, then my task is to find out where the allegorical meaning of a monument could come to a standstill. My task is to construct what Benjamin calls the interpenetration of images.

At a first glance, there is only a road and its name. Toponymy is an important part of historical geography and henceforth of Psychogeography: toponyms are often stable in time, and they document the history of a settlement. Migratory movements of individuals are reflected in the origin of names, the anthroponyms, which are particularly instructive. As I have analyzed before, residential site names like Lourenço Marques (city), Mount Everest (mountain) or Rhodesia (country) represent the reference of general toponyms to the names of explorers and colonizers in the strict sense, which means, those places are ideologically interpellated by their very names.



Figure 35: Bullfighter Ricardo Chibanga posing at the sign of the street that was named after him in the town of Golegã. (Thomas Behrens)

What struck me when I came across this road sign are the absent signifiers: The sign says that Ricardo Chibanga is a bullfighter, but it does not say that he is of African



origin. (Fig.35) However, his name makes this fact conspicuous by its absence and nevertheless influences the meaning of a signifier actually used. Another form of absence has the specific label of ‘that which goes without saying’, in this case, the fact that usually bullfighting is an activity reserved for a predominantly white, Iberian aristocratic class. Suddenly, the divisibility of this place emerges from the name, from the fallen language that came to inscribe this place. As such a language must communicate something (something other than itself) the road sign does not exactly name the place. It refers to a person, an African bullfighter, who came to live in Portugal, which had been a colonial power at the time when he came. The official ideology in Portugal stated that all territories in Africa were actually an integral part of Portugal - there was no such thing as a colony, and the natives of these ‘provinces’ were actually citizens of Portugal. The road that I encountered now turns into a place where a tension emerges with the split between the topographic vision of colonial Africa and the proper name *Rua Ricardo Chibanga* that haunts this urban space with an additional meaning that needs to be addressed. There is a new inhabitant in this town whose absence creates in the place itself the erosion of nowhere that the law of the other carves out within it. Toponymy can play a significant political role in a society, especially regarding national or ethnic power claims.



Figure 36: Bullfight arena *Monumental* in Maputo, in 2014

In this sense, the bullfight arena *Monumental* in Lourenço Marques, Mozambique (Fig. 36), was an attempt to consolidate colonial claims with a massive architectural and cultural presence. In my film, we see the ruin of the arena as well as the testimony of the Ricardo Chibanga's brother, that "bullfighting had no roots in Africa". In the film, the ruin of the abandoned arena, which is now located in Maputo, serves as a symbol of the failure of this particular colonial strategy.

After all, Benjamin writes that it is possible to discern more about a great building from its plans or ruins than from the completed construct itself. For Benjamin the value of the ruin was, in part, the fact that it had passed through a history. It had the marks of a process on it. The political value of that history - fact, dreams, all of it - lies in its reconstruction and interpretation, to remove thought from the realm of mythology, remaining sensitive to its relevance in the present." (Leslie, 2000)

However, the failure of this strategy makes Ricardo Chibanga's success story appear even more heroic, because in the end, he is the one who gets his own monument in the toponymy of the Portuguese city of Golegã. His personal triumph can be read as a metaphor for the blowback that the colonial power Portugal had to face in the aftermath of the colonial wars in Africa. Usually, Toponymy is instrumentalized to lead the proof that a certain territory belongs to a corresponding national culture or ethnic group. One example would be the Portuguese name Lourenço Marques that was changed to Maputo after Mozambique gained political independence. The name of the road *Rua Ricardo Chibanga* thus indicates that a part of the Portuguese territory had been individually 'colonized'. The new symbolic, and in this case, also real inhabitant of Golegã, transforms a familiar place into a familiar haunt.

#### 14.2. Process: Psychogeography - walking and contemplating

My practical work aspires to construct the dialectical image, where present and past interact with one another - Walter Benjamin's method and subject of critical analysis. The world is transformed into images, that fit together only for the individual - for everyone else, they are just fragments. I am a Psychogeographer, which means that I walk both in urban and rural environments. During these walks, I can shift my attention continuously: Let us take the simple example of a tree: As a scientist, I would see the



biosphere in a tree: an organism of the flora, a plant, a habitat for various animals, a provider of oxygen, etc. As an economist, I see the resources in the tree: how many cubic meters of wood does this tree produce, of what quality, what kinds of fruit does he produce, fruit and wood is suitable for which specific industry, how long does it take, with a special fertilizer to grow this tree up to a certain size, what does this tree produce in financial terms? As an artist, I see the tree as part of the semiosphere: what sensation, what symbolism is associated with this tree? Is it a dead, standalone tree without leaves or fruit? Does it symbolize winter or death? It is the privilege of a dialectical, non-static contemplation, to not get caught in just one of these areas of expertise. As a photographer and filmmaker, I often imagine to literally walk through a film sequence.

Since I am familiar with a variety of film related professions, (I have worked as producer, editor and director on fiction films as well as documentaries), I sometimes wonder how I would capture or represent the place where I now am, either in a glamorous commercial or else in documentary style. In other words, how is the perception of place determined by my personal point of view and, more generally, my projections? The resulting work, in the form of a series of photographs, a text or a video are, in this sense, always preliminary results of a dialectical process; they are important inasmuch as they open up the process for the other, a possible spectator, as in a dialogue or a debate, who decides that he does not want to be just a passive listener (consumer), but an active interpreter. The complex questions about places and the ways they are represented, can then grow into more general discourses that surpass these dimensions: How are belief systems (ideologies) constructed? Which properties support their structure? How can their structure be disrupted (restructured)? If we compare a belief system with a map, we might ask: where are the non-mapped trails, the desire paths, which the official maps do not contain? The experience of place reflects how a physical location intersects with a human body. The constant exchange that takes place between these entities and the various tempos of habit and societal lifecycles thicken the threads, which make up the fabric of places. As a practice of meditation and contemplation, Psychogeography aims at perpetuating especially one thing: the transgression and subversion of established systems and standardized perceptions. Psychogeography is also a kind of corrective to the general, technology-driven optimism, especially the

tendency to champion a mechanical numbness and the devastating psychological consequences of the inadequateness of the human body and its sensorium.

When I walk, my body and my mind move at the same time, but they are agents with different concerns and agendas. My body, including all senses, moves in a biogeographical environment, it reacts to direct stimuli and impulses. My spirit, however, does not always accompany the actions of the body, spirit actually wants full transcendence. Hegel has already understood the relation of body and mind as a struggle. The quest of the spirit is the negation of the body: spirit only realizes totally in the moment when it negates the body. Only in transcendence there lies wholeness and unity, but this unity is an illusion. In my own state of mind, even though I may walk through a busy district, I often live in memories, I am absorbed by worries or fantasies, I may reflect on a book I just read, or I enjoy a song, I just listen. I could even be involved in a conversation on the phone about abstract theological questions while I'm walking on a busy street in Lisbon. Scientists of the Humanities prefer therefore quiet, pleasantly air-conditioned reading salons, places where no sudden stimuli catch their attention and where they don't have to assume the presence of the body. A library can provide an environment that comes closest to a state total transcendence of the spirit, which is necessary for their work.

As a Psychogeographer, on the street, I downright challenge an impairment, which I call contingency. While wandering, I can collect contingent information and impulses from my immediate surroundings, which is then incorporated into my mental disposition, my thinking, in a creative sense I just pollute the spirit, instead of seeking total transcendence. My mind and body move as if they were on a Möbius strip: a moment ago I was still on the inside, and now I am on the outside of it, without having to step through a door or a window into a different sphere, with a sensation not unlike that of a scientist of the humanities, who eventually has to leave the library for a cold, rainy street. My wanderings in the semiosphere happen accordingly in a topological sense; the environment is at the same time inside (mental) and outside, hence the Möbius strip. A Psychogeographer is thus not so much a scientist who is conducting a classic experiment, where he examines an object as a neutral observer. The Psychogeographer is not so much concerned with finding facts or truths, but with finding 'sense' (meaning), and meaning is, prior to anything, an individual, not a

universal concept. The poet Goethe wrote in *Wanderer's Nightsong II* 'Über allen Gipfeln Ist Ruh' (Above all summits it is calm) (Goethe, 1780) and this contemplation establishes a direct relationship between his personal sensation, his interior and a picture of his environment, which is almost tangible. It is here that Psychogeography alludes to the romantic tradition: we perceive a tree not as a scientific entity, neither as an economic resource; rather we experience a tree as a part of our interior, hence we want to protect it as a part of us and do not wish to externalize it, leaving it to a technocratic logic. Equipped with this belief, we don't want to leave something as important as sex to the pornographers, who try to tell us how our sexual preferences have to look like, and we do not want to leave our personal time to the organizers and agendas, who seek to mould time into a framework, which consists of small bites of hours, in order to assign to these bites an hourly wage, etc.

Psychological problems are only deemed problematic, because the individual is not functioning in a socially sanctioned synchronicity with a respective technologically standardized environment. The monumental failure of modern psychotherapy lies in its aim to restore the functionality of the individual with regard to the dominant system, a thoroughly technocratic approach, which prioritizes an abstract system (ideology/economy) above the individual needs of the people. Max Weber already noted, that we are trapped in an edifice of bondage. Since capitalism has emancipated from its religious roots, the asceticism of the monk cells has been transferred out into professional life and henceforth began to dominate the inner secular morality. This asceticism helped to build powerful modern universe, bound to technical and economic conditions of mechanical machine production. An economic order that today determines the life and time of each individual, who, upon birth, is delivered to this engine, with overwhelming force.

The agents of psyche regulate the relationship between my body, my mind and my exterior environment. My psyche is informed by all entities and governs my libidinal investments. Psyche is often associated with the subconscious, which, in turn, is often represented as the larger, submersed part of an iceberg, from which just the peak stands out above a water surface. This tip of the iceberg is our conscious mind, but it is only a small part of our instincts and desires. We are often unaware of the psychological motivation behind a decision that we make - the decision would look

differently if it had been a purely rational, intellectually motivated one. It follows also that the super-ego can't be part of our conscious mind - it resides in the subconscious, just like the id. If we return to the image of the iceberg, the super-ego presents the Weberian edifice that constantly seeks to mould the tip of the iceberg into a certain form. Thus, the super-ego is more than the symbolic order. It's not the sheer existence of a particular language, but rather a piece of legislation, which must be respected and followed under the threat of punishment. The Weberian edifice of bondage is synonymous with the collective super-ego.

Humanity is defined by its relationship to technology. Technological progress has opened up undreamed-of possibilities to the limits of both, the human body and the human mind. Technology replaces or externalizes our limited functionalities; we seek to hand them over to machines, in exchange for enormous competitive advantages. Machines make us stronger, faster, smarter, but they confront the human psyche with enormous challenges because, similar to the relationship between the super-ego (technology) and id (emotional-driven man), little space is left for our action space (ego). There is always the danger that the tool or the media exceeds to be merely the extension of man, but on the contrary, that the human being is reduced to an extension of the media. In turn, it was Max Weber who asked how any remnant of an individualistic and free movement could be even possible with this tendency for bureaucratization. We may use term bureaucratization interchangeably with mechanization or mediatization.

On my walks, I either take photographs, or I decide to write a text or make a movie about something that I encountered in my mental disposition. My thinking and acting is, inevitably, a result of the abstract formulation of the planned route (itinerary) and the negation of this abstraction by means of the concrete experience, the unique encounter with my environment, the actual trace (trajectory), my presence has left. I use the term encounter, because it's not about a discovery or a conquest; I do not pretend to be a neutral observer, who documents what he sees, and gathers facts, just like most journalists do. An encounter is an experience of something unexpected, sometimes difficult or even hostile, but necessary - it is the prerequisite for any dialectical discourse, the conflict after the first act, the beginning of a negation, the cognitive dissonance demanding a reaction. This sense of cognitive dissonance is something I

generally welcome as a challenge. Often I need to consciously change my frame of mind completely, to create conflicts. I could, for example, wander through the streets of Lisbon using a map of Beijing. Or I could try to follow a randomly selected person, with the same obsessive attitude, that Jimmy Stewart makes follow Madeleine in Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*. I think these examples are sufficient to make it clear that Psychogeography has nothing to do with conventional journalism. As a Psychogeographer, I allow my own imagination to change the environment in the fashion of the expressionist painters who replayed what they saw through their individual, psychological distorting mirror. This is not something an investigative journalist or a travel journalist would allow himself. What then usually happens, is that my surroundings speak with a new, fresh and generous voice to me, and everything I have to do is to listen carefully and eventually document this voice. An example for an early Psychogeographer would be Walter Benjamin, who as flâneur and collagist, created his unfinished arcades project (it is in the nature of these projects, that they are never finished).

Benjamin elaborated a collage of thoughts in active response to what was actually supposed to be passively consumed: the objects in the shop windows of Paris. It is the negation of the forced gaze of the consumer, that finally produced a new context for the extracted elements of a de facto environment, which is regulated through a libidinal investment which follows the AIDA formula, which the advertising industry has put forward: Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. This dialectical process is likely to generate new meanings, where the new text is definitely more than merely the sum of its parts. The proceedings of Psychogeography, as I have pointed out, aim to make sense, but, and this is the point, a sense that was hidden or not intended. The process of generating meaning is under way as a common value-system that provides a structure made of language, monuments, signs, etc. - and the social reactions of people who are compelled to live in these spaces.

One of the central categories of modernity is artificiality; this expresses a definitive farewell from nature as something what we experience immediately, as something that is not yet a category in itself, like territory, or landscape or environment. This artificiality, deplored as loss or praised as gain gave rise to a myth that would oppose the myth of nature - the myth of the city.

But a new myth not simply takes the place of the former, the discarded concept nests as a residue in modern comprehension and nature turns into an image, a sign - landscape, in a first approach, then as territory and resource, in a second approach that raises immediately the questions of property and law. The third approach then goes beyond the issues of ownership and has to tackle the question of environment. Environment is a complex term that concerns common ground and common responsibility as well as the public sphere, a more or less neutral sphere where all stakeholders are equally important and where it is possible to live as a community.

Finally, there's the semiosphere, a concept that is based on the sign value of landscape, but goes much further. The difference could be found in the question why a home owner would usually not object if an artist asked him if he could make a painting that depicts his house, but who would change his mind if a company like Google photographed his house to include the image in their Street View application. Outside of the dominant modes of assembly and the abstract logic that organizes the public sphere and, at the same time, diminishes it through acts of enclosure and privatization, there is still an excess of fact and sign that constitutes daily life. The claim for the right to a public sphere is the claim that common ground and common time can be the active space of human experience by fully realizing the unique temporal and spatial instances that are possible only in the diversity and density of chance occurrences of public life. These moments, encounters, are situated, unplanned connections with which real people constitute space that they define and occupy and that cannot exist outside of their encounter. It is only in these moments that a dweller may become a citizen. In the global village, we must become residents who, as travelers and translators, take care of collective memories, which would otherwise be lost in the noise.

#### 14.3. Process: analytical truth procedure or creative process?

Walter Benjamin suggested that truth could be found upon the recognition of myth. "Where the presence of truth should be possible, it can be possible solely under the condition of the recognition of myth - that is, the recognition of its crushing indifference to truth." (Benjamin, 1996: 326)

My first task is to reinsert the body, the living person into the picture, to create a presence, which is lost in the mere signifier: the road sign with his name on it. This juxtaposition reduces all fragments, which create a mosaic of History, to a single picture, which is critically interruptive in the same way that the historical object - the body - functions in historical materialism. Both are self-contained units that serve to break up smooth conceptions of History by a sudden shock of juxtaposition. This interruptive shock, which makes space for a necessary distance for critical contemplation, now allows me to take the dialectical image and examine it: in the picture, present and past illuminate one another in a sudden 'constellation with the Now'. (Pensky, 2001: 217) However, there is always a level of subjectivity in every act of construction, and there is no point in pretending objectivity. Constructing a dialectical image is tinged in subjectivity, because to make choices involves some degree of subjective arbitrariness. "What is it about the constructive moment of materialist historiography that assures the correct construction of the finely cut fragments?" (Pensky, 2001: 224) Here again the image of a detective comes to mind, who has to ask himself constantly during an investigation: can I be sure that this is the correct interpretation, the right way of looking at the case before me? Adorno said that negative dialectics is about a form of thinking that goes against itself and thought should be measured by the extremity that eludes the concept.

One possible path to rescue fragmented images from historicism is to engage with emotions and the unconscious. Freud has argued that it is our unconscious being of which we have no awareness that determines our conscious thoughts. Therefore, the latent content of our dreams can be equated with the latent but as yet unrealized possibilities in History.

When the 'lightening flash' of dialectical imagery shocks us into sight, it isn't that we can see the story of history clearly—that would be playing into historicism. We are confronted with an image that wakes us 'from the dream time of capitalism', that disrupts notions of historical progress. Instead of the 'dream' of historical causality, we are presented with a fragmented mosaic that illuminates why certain kinds of historical insight are possible under certain determinate conditions. (Pensky, 2001: 223)

It is paramount to capitalize on the fluctuating tensions between subjectivity and objectivity by handing the task to uncover the fragments and to piece them back

together, to the viewer. The conditioned consumer of History has to be confronted with his own passivity and conformity. Allegorical images would be effective if they didn't confirm audiences in their passivity. In contrast, the dialectical image is either understood in a flash or not understood at all. In my film, I have insisted that there would be no off-comment, to allow an overall level of subjectivity, which is therefore different from a suggestive allegorical image inasmuch as the dialectical imagery's subjectivity allows for ambiguity and critical examination. Critical intervention is impossible with an allegorical image because allegory only serves historicism. Historical materialism seeks to destroy Historicism by creating the dialectical image; by empowering and activating audiences, by rescuing them from their imposed passivity. Historical materialism would encourage Truman Burbank, the contemporary prisoner in Plato's cave, not only to step outside the painted studio walls, but also to move to the heart of the *phantasmagoria*, to confront the creator of this fake universe and make him expose the mechanics behind it. The subject-object problem is not supposed to be solved but transferred - from the film to the spectator as a subject. The intriguing arbitrariness of the dialectical image is in itself perhaps the reason for my own interest and the search for arguments for the contemporary relevance of the dialectical image. Benjamin has often evoked a historical 'trash heap', and in fact, we transform something into trash if it serves to bring closure to a certain topic. An archive, such as the RTP archive that I consulted for the film, is only useful if there are layers upon layers to be uncovered, actualized and reinterpreted. If an archive merely serves to 'bury' obsolete information, then it should indeed be considered a trash heap. The same goes for monuments, museums, maps, etc. My film contrasts two monuments: On the one hand, there is the road sign in Golegã, which stands for Historicism, and which supposedly brings closure to the biography of Ricardo Chibanga and on the other hand, there's the decaying bullfight arena *Monumental* in Maputo, where his story had begun. The contemporary image of this monument *is* the dialectical image, since

Walter Benjamin said something very deep. He said we experience history, not when things move, but when we see them at a rest. Wastes of culture being half-retaken with nature. At that point, we get an intuition of what history means. Maybe without this moment of authentic, artistic possibility, nothing new can emerge. Maybe something new only emerges through the failure, the proper functioning of the existing network." (Zizek, 2013)



#### 14.4. Process: Why look at bullfighting?

Slavoj Žižek defines the 'obscene object of postmodernity' in contrast to the before mentioned 'modern' film *Blow-Up*, where the structure works without a body:

'Postmodernism' is the exact reverse of this process. It consists not in demonstrating that the game works without an object, that the play is set in motion by a central absence, but rather in displaying the object directly, allowing it to make visible its own indifferent and arbitrary character. The same object can function successively as a disgusting reject and as a sublime, charismatic apparition: the difference, strictly structural, does not pertain to the 'effective properties' of the object, but only to its place in the symbolic order. (Žižek, 1992: 143)

When I decided to make a film about a bullfighter, it wasn't because I was in particular interested in the spectacle. Actually, I have never been to a bullring before and I have never witnessed the public killing of an animal. What caught my interest in the first place was a story of a peasant, who, in ancient Greece, was in the audience of a theatre play. When, at one point, one of the characters in the play was supposed to get murdered, the peasant jumped on the stage and tried to prevent the assassin from doing his evil deed. Needless to say that the crowd laughed at him. The dumb peasant didn't recognize, that he was watching something staged. I thought that in the case of a bullfight, a spectacle as ancient as theater, the peasant would actually have had a good reason for doing this. In fact, one of the involved opponents in a bullfight gets killed. Typically, it's the bull, but things can go wrong - and sometimes they do go wrong. To a certain degree, there exists also a real threat for the audience, precisely because there is no screen that would serve as a protective, sanitizing shield. The bull can jump into the space reserved for the viewers and actually injure, or even kill people.

In a way, bullfighting is an exception from what Freud called civilization, and that is the most obvious reason for its contemporary political incorrectness. For sure, any war is barbarism a tenfold worse than a bullfight, an exception from our otherwise civilized world, but the difference lies in the perception of these two sanctioned ways of killing. War is supposedly an unwanted, inevitable horror, which we should not look upon with joy or satisfaction, whereas the killing of a bull is accompanied with cheers and applause. It is as if the culture of bullfighting does not fit in the contemporary imperative of enjoyment, which champions only abortive, non-consequential and sanitized activities, like mass shootings in video games or online dating.

The ritual of bullfighting is rooted in prehistoric bull worship and sacrifice in the Mediterranean region and Mesopotamia. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* first describes a bullfight in a chapter where Gilgamesh and Enkidu together fought and killed the Bull of Heaven: "The bull seemed indestructible, for hours they fought, till Gilgamesh, dancing in front of the bull, lured it with his tunic and bright weapons, and Enkidu thrust his sword, deep into the bull's neck, and killed it." (Ziolkowski, 2011: 51) The ritualistic slaughtering of the sacred bull was the central iconic act of the Mithras-worship in the Roman Empire, which was commemorated in the Mithraeum, where Roman soldiers were stationed. In Spain, the modern corrida began to take form as commoners on foot substituted horsemen who usually came from an aristocratic background. The practice of fighting on foot was introduced around 1726, probably because this type of fighting drew more attention from the crowds, but in Portugal, the dominant figure of the bullfight is still the horseman (cavaleiro). The new style prompted the construction of bullrings, initially square and later round, to discourage the cornering of the action. In Portugal, the finale of the corrida goes back to a tradition from ancient Greece and consists of a ritual called the 'pega', where men (forcados) form a line in front of the bull and when it runs at them, they try to grab and hold the bull by its horns. In Crete, bull leaping, an early form of the 'pega', was portrayed in the ancient town of Knossos, home to the Minotaur, a creature deemed half human, half bull - myths related to bulls existed throughout Greece. The idiomatic expression "to take the bull by the horns" is still in use today and means to face a difficulty directly and grapple with it without avoiding it.

However, bullfighting is one of today's most contested public spectacles: supporters of bullfighting argue that it is a valuable cultural tradition and a fully developed form of art, which is equally important as painting, music and dance, while animal rights advocates hold that it is a blood sport resulting in the suffering of bulls, horses and, from time to time, human beings. At the heart of each contemporary criticism that is held against this anachronistic spectacle stands a pattern: not so much the fact that an animal is being killed, but that it is killed in public - in order to excite and entertain an audience. This is, in conventional terms, something to be considered obscene. An obscenity is any statement or act, which strongly offends the prevalent morality of the time, but the definition of what precisely constitutes an obscenity differs

from culture to culture. However, the term ‘obscene’ is derived from the Latin *obscaena* (offstage), because some potentially offensive content, such as explicit sex or graphic violence, was supposed to ‘happen’ offstage in classical drama. What Žižek describes as the ‘obscene object of postmodernity’ is therefore that what shouldn’t be seen, because it is inconsistent, or ‘too real’ in the case of the before mentioned elephant in the room. Žižek goes on to say that “the postmodernist *inconsistency* of the Other is retroactively perceived by the modernist gaze as its *incompleteness*.” (Žižek, 1992: 145)

Since I am from Germany, one of the countries where the majority would speak out against bullfights, I became interested in the subject. At first I thought about the fact that in Germany millions of animals are slaughtered on a daily basis. This isn’t something that the majority would condemn. Apart from some radical vegan or animal-rights groups, there is no significant opposition to that. Animals are killed in an industrial environment, mostly by machines, far from the reach of the public, and the meat is being transformed into sausages and sometimes even into charcuterie in the shape of a cute teddy bear, designed for children. In his essay *Why look at animals?* John Berger analyses the alienation of humans and animals as a consequence of nineteenth-century capitalism, and contrasts it with an earlier period when the relations between humans and animals were more integrated.

Animals were subjected and worshipped, bred and sacrificed. Today the vestiges of this dualism remain among those who live intimately with, and depend upon, animals. A peasant becomes fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant, and is so difficult for the urban stranger to understand, is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*. What distinguished man from animals was the human capacity for symbolic thought. Yet the first symbols were animals. In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them. And in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy. (Berger, 1980: 7)

Anthropomorphism is any attribution of human characteristics to animals or plants and non-living things and as an ancient literary device, anthropomorphism is rooted in art and storytelling. In almost every culture there are long-standing fable traditions, which employ anthropomorphized animals as characters to represent commonly recognized types of human behavior. Religious doctrines, such as the Christian great chain of being propound rather the opposite, anthropocentric belief that animals, plants and non-living things, unlike humans, do not possess any mental or

spiritual attributes, immortal souls, and anything other than relatively limited instinct. However, since Berger says that ‘today, we live without animals’, the ancient anthropomorphism has now given way to a plethora of signifiers, visual or else, that are symbols of their absence. Alienated from living with and sometimes against animals, we can only perceive them in two different ways, and both perceptions are perhaps equally misleading: either the animal is a cute, sad-eyed or in whatever way humanized being, though utterly unreal, we feel empathy for, or, the commoditized, faceless mass product, that we consider a soulless resource for our own alimentation or a pest that should be ‘exterminated’. In this statement resonates my former analysis of malls and camps, as if, in consumer society, the separating screen only leaves place for one perception or the other. In 2014 pope Francis suggested that pets and other animals have a place in heaven, which is in stark contradiction to conservative Catholic teaching that animals don't have souls. However, scientists had always refused to assume that animals could share any of the social, mental, psychological or ethical capacities of human beings; they prefer to rely on the strictly observable evidence. Scientific method involves detached observation and measurement of the subject of inquiry - empathy towards animals is generally not considered useful. The problem is that this scientific lack of empathy will sooner or later be applied to humans as well, and herein resides the self-destructive tendency of economic and technocratic rationality.

Bullfighting is therefore not longer politically correct, because the animal is being killed in ritualistic way, and this ritual involves contingency. In our contemporary society, animals have to be killed in a rationalist, even technocratic way that does not involve either emotions or danger for humans. As a pure simulation, bullfighting would be entirely socially acceptable. However, bullfighting is still reminiscent to art in prehistoric times, when the cult value of the artwork was absolute; art was primarily a vehicle for magic, the cast of a spell, as ritual sacrifice meant to bring about fertility or hunting luck. Only much later the objects involved in the ritual were referred to as works of art. These works of art were remainders of the ritual and served as reminders, as an *ersatz* for the ritual and eventually, they were instrumentalized for other purposes of religious or political nature – today, they are a vital part of the consumerist society.

#### 14.5. Product: the making of the documentary

It is widely believed, that the narrative level in documentary films is only at a marginal distance from pure reality. I find this claim very problematic, especially when it is legitimized through a factual veridicity. In my opinion, realism rather means that the narrative admits its own constructedness, instead of pretending to show an objective reality. It's not so much the story of the film, be it a fictional or a real, but the narrative space created by the film, which makes a difference. The measure is how far this narrative space can be entered and explored by a viewer.

In my film, I used the music *Sketches of Spain* by Miles Davis to open up a whole new narrative space, which runs parallel to the film narrative, but supposedly also contaminates the story of the world's first black African bullfighter. The idea behind this is simple: just as Miles Davis transformed the traditional music of Spain, so Chibanga has transformed the Iberian bullfighting tradition. This parallel is a construction, but it reflects a certain reality without ever directly or explicitly claiming to be true. Herein resides a fundamental definition of narrative film music: cinematic diegesis opens a broader narrative space for perception, and then the interpenetration of different narrative levels actually makes sense and is not just a gimmick. It is hence not important what kind of music the characters in the film actually hear or whether the music is actually part of the fictional universe (though this distinction also may be of interest), or whether they find out, like Truman, that the reality surrounding them is actually made of cardboard - crucial is rather, if music or the extra-diegetic elements open a new dimension of narrative space, of meaning, that the reader or spectator can relate to.

To be sure, in a first analysis we must distinguish between extra-diegetic and diegetic elements. The former include elements that exist outside of the cinematic universe, like voice-over, music, titles, etc., while the latter refer to all other elements, explicitly present in the filmic universe. However, this distinction does not help determine whether these elements open up a new level of perception. Truman is clearly a fit for the category of diegetic elements, because the creators of the series gave him his particular in this show, yet his own ignorance about this role renders him the extra-diegetic element par excellence - and this is the fundamental difference of the concept of the series. Only Truman himself as the extra-diegetic element can therefore change

the perception of the whole narrative space. I dare to say that, in my film, as in reality, Ricardo Chibanga had a similar role in the History of Iberian bullfight culture.

#### 14.6. Product: the stranger is the extra-diegetic element

Ricardo Chibanga is by no means a revolutionary in the sense that he was seeking actively to revolutionize a political system. He is not leaning to the political left or to the right, but rather, he finds himself, like Truman Burbank in the *Truman Show*, in a position where everything he does reveals a political dimension, although he himself is rather naïve or unaware of this. His mere existence as a native African boy from a lower class family with no ties to the culture of the Colonizers makes him stand in a Dionysian tradition. This tradition sees a divine quality in the stranger, who was perceived by the ancient Greeks as a God; a God who could bring a new perspective on a familiar situation. This new perspective is made possible solely by his mere presence.

This presence of a foreign element that seems to exist at a first glance independently, impossible to assimilate, can give a new meaning to a situation and alters the narrative fundamentally, because now, this element determines all other elements in the narrative space.

Terry Eagleton wrote:

There is a paradox in the idea of transformation. If a transformation is deep-seated enough, it might also transform the very criteria by which we could identify it, thus making it unintelligible to us. But if it is intelligible, it might be because the transformation was not radical enough. If we can talk about the change then it is not full-blooded enough; but if it is full-blooded enough, it threatens to fall outside our comprehension. Change must presuppose continuity - a subject to whom the alteration occurs - if we are not to be left merely with two incommensurable states; but how can such continuity be compatible with revolutionary upheaval? (Eagleton, 2003: 246)

To this dilemma there is a proper solution: radical change does not mean a mere change within a consistent coordinate system; it means rather that it changes the very coordinates by means of which change will be measured. True novelty sets its own standards: there is a time before and a time after that change, just as there is a time before and after Jesus Christ. Ricardo Chibanga has, through his success, changed the very coordinates that determined Iberian bullfighting culture. While he was active,

Mozambique gained independence, Portugal had its April revolution in 1974, Lourenço Marques changed its name to Maputo and the bullfight arena Monumental is now an abandoned ruin. Today, however, there is, in the Portuguese town of Golegã, a street with the name *Rua Ricardo Chibanga*.

In making my film, it was important to me to make clear that throughout Ricardo Chibanga's career, his symbolic identity was always historically determined, dependent upon a specific ideological constellation. The ideological interpellation resides in the symbolic identity that is conferred on somebody as the result of the way the ruling ideology is structured: are we citizens or outsiders, democrats or dissidents, Indigenous or Christians, white colonizer or black colonized? Hysteria emerges when somebody starts to question or feels discomfort in his or her imposed symbolic identity: Ricardo Chibanga was given the name 'El Africano' by the press in Spain, but he refused to assume this name, instead, he kept fighting under his family name, Chibanga. Ideological interpellation happens whenever there is an attempt to impose a symbolic title or identity onto an individual, and this creates a gap.

Because of this gap, the subject cannot ever fully and immediately identify with his symbolic mask or title; the subject's questioning of his symbolic title is what hysteria is about: 'Why am I what you're saying that I am?' Or, to quote Shakespeare's Juliet: 'Why am I that name?' There is a truth in the wordplay between 'hysteria' and 'historia': the subject's symbolic identity is always historically determined, dependent upon a specific ideological context. (Zizek, 2006: 34-35)

Finally, I would like to ask that my own hysterical approach to the genre *Road Movie* should not remain un-noticed since it resulted in an 'aberrant decoding' of the original concept: a Road Movie is a film genre in which "the main characters leave home to travel from place to place, typically altering the perspective from their everyday lives." (Danesi, 2009: 256)

## CONCLUSION

Capitalism is all the time in crisis. This is why it appears all the time indestructible. Crisis is not its obstacles. It's what pushes it towards permanent, revolutionizing, self-

reproduction. Always more production. The other invisible side of it is waste, tremendous amounts of waste. We shouldn't react to these heaps of waste by trying to somehow get rid of it. Maybe the first thing to do is accept the waste, to accept that there are things out there that serve nothing. To break out of this eternal cycle of functioning. (Žižek, 2013)

When a dialectics of seeing is employed for the production of images, one phenomenon takes on a central role: mimetic desire. Mimesis works here in a triangle, there is a mediator between subject and object, which determines the gaze and has the power to make the object a desirable object or not. What is qua identification of the subject assumed is desire itself. In any case, mimetic desire aims to assimilate the original object, to consume it. In a work of art, the act of consumption is forever delayed; its ultimate secret will never be given away. Therein lies the effect of every dramaturgy, which is a heritage of the Christian belief in an afterlife, where the final act, the hereafter, is forever postponed, at least, it remains unresolved in the course of our finite lifetimes. Mimesis is a form of imitation, which can be caused by the artist who creates a work of art. However, mimesis also can be experienced by those who look at work of art. Mimesis is a fundamental concept of how meaning is generated, first by the discovery of similarities and then through imitation of recognized and proven patterns or models. Similarities are absorbed by the human consciousness and then transposed into language. As such, language becomes a fund of relevance, and writing becomes an activity that extends beyond the author. Unconscious elements are incorporated in the process of writing, either because the writer was not aware of them or the reader finds more meaning in a text, because of a new or different context. In fact, a written text often reveals more than the writer was aware of, just like a certain perspective tells sometimes more about the photographer than he was aware of, when he captured a specific object in a supposedly objective fashion. The reader must decode the words which he has before him, and his only helpful resource is his own imagination, which exceeds not only the purely rational, but must have certain intersections with the author's stock of imagination. The activity of reading encapsulates also the principles of mimesis as a tool, which may lead eventually to some moments of revelation. Walter Benjamin stressed the significance of these revelations when he reflected on the aforementioned flash, where the dialectics of seeing culminates in a kind of 'Eureka!' moment, when everything falls into place and we understand something. Something



inaccessible to pure language and which cannot be expressed by mere repetition of certain sets or sequences. It is pure meaning, and the sense of meaning can never be explicitly expressed, it can only be felt. This finding suggests already that mimesis is more than mere imitation.

Benjamin reverses the old Platonic hierarchy between the ideal, but immaterial object (model) and its representation, which is often perceived as inferior. Plato's notion of mimesis falls short of Benjamin's notion of mimesis. A mere copy is a degraded form of imitation, where it is not even important if the copy is losing something of the quality of the original or not. Benjamin argued that Plato confused mimesis with copying, or plagiarism, where a work seems technically flawless, but is like a corpse: uninspired, dead, the spirit is gone.

A technocratic concept of mimesis must lead directly into a conundrum, as soon as a text or a picture, or anything that can be technically reproduced, is taken at face value. Today, in the age of digital lossless playback, Benjamin's challenge is timelier than ever. Postmodern ideas of mimesis are never exclusively about the subject as such. Questions of authorship and ownership are far more important and today, mimesis would relate rather to the intellectual dimension of an object, and not so much its shape or formal content. Mimesis as a creative approach can create new and constructive interpretations of an original, and this in turn designates the creative act itself, which would be ineffective without the framework it transcends. Beyond this, mimesis may become the only way to develop empathy with the world, where we have the chance to understand the other, to assimilate the other. Imagination and actualization are at work in mimesis, mimesis is crucial to bring a subject in accordance with an object. Imagination mediates between the unconscious and the conscious, between dream and reality. Imagination is creating a parallel story as it follows the narration when we are reading a novel or watching the plot of a film unfold - this story constitutes our own narrative, it is how we relate to what we read or see, not as a way to escape reality, but as a way to get access to reality - a reality which is ontologically questioned, if we see it as a mind/body problem.

Today, we have the prospect of real time. This means that it is no longer a question of focusing on a vanishing point to ensure a static spatial perception, but a

question of synchronization. Electromagnetic waves require tuning in, to synchronize procedures and thus allow the perception of space in real-time. (what comes to mind is the surveillance video camera, that can be outsmarted by a thief, who just feeds a video stream of an empty, undisturbed showroom into the surveillance system and then goes on about his business)

That means, far away places (distance) move so very close to the subject - but they are not distanced, since the temporal dimension, time, is compressed to zero. Everything is pure immersion, connection in the here and now. The Renaissance perspective of real space was, in fact, an act of distancing, placing an object in the distance, which enabled a cool and critical, even scientific gaze at it. The electromagnetic capacity brings about a perspective of real-time, but parallel and complementary to the perspective of real space, we are bombarded again, like in the middle ages, with apparitions and revelations. However, these are no divine revelations, but spectral images, administered by technological media. In order to reclaim a critical distance in the age of real-time, we have to create a temporal distance to create a temporal dissociation, an impulse-control - diachrony against synchrony. This diachrony can only be found in our physical nature, our bodies. Neo-liberal capitalism does no longer care to interpellate anyone into symbolically anchored identities, which are structured according to conventions of race, gender, class or nationality. Instead, it encourages subjects to develop an insatiable thirst for relentless self-fashioning, masked as individuality. The demise of symbolic efficiency may appear to promise a new freedom from rigid norms and expectations. However, these non-anchored identities are accompanied by a certain fragility and insecurity, which only reveals the fundamental nakedness of the subject. Imaginary identities are incapable of establishing a firm place to stand, a position from which one could develop a point of view, a moral stance and internalized discipline. Moreover, their very mutability and normative ambiguity configure screen-induced identities as ideal receivers for operations of control, where desires and fears can be administered with the swipe of a hand and in a synchronized fashion.

The perspective of real-time, for example on live TV ousted a perspective, that involved processing, based on the latency principle. Photochemical processes always contain a phase in which the image is latent, which means that it has been captured

already, but not yet developed. This period of developing, which includes waiting and reflecting, is inscribed in a variety of analog processes; it has its evolutionary equivalent in the biological and psychological development of the child. Freud described the latency phase as the time where the sexual and aggressive drives are transformed into socially more accepted forms, and expressed by the defense mechanisms of repression and sublimation. During the latency period, the energy that the child previously invested in Oedipal rivalry can now be used for the development of consciousness, awareness. Digital, discrete technology eliminates latency, development, and process. An image without duration is a picture that has no duration in its development process or in his subsequent contemplation: it is a picture that has no human dimension. It is a picture made by a machine, and it exists only for the machine. My guess is that most of the billions of pictures that are taken on one single day are not even looked at. Digital photos are produced and exhibited in a fraction of a second: it will be their fate to be looked at only for the fraction of a second, or not looked at all. This paradigm shift in human perception, which is caused by the digital revolution, will have to be examined at this level.

Finally, I would like to go back to the image employed by Bataille, where he describes a child, which pushes his nose on the windowpane that separates it from the world: I remember, when I was five years old, I had a contagious disease, and I had to be treated in hospital. My parents could visit me, but we had to stay separated by a glass screen. They, and all other visitors, had to be protected from catching a contagious infection. It was heartbreaking sometimes for my parents and myself, to not being able to, in this difficult situation, comfort and being comforted, with hugs and kisses. I remember how tears were running down my face while they were looking at me through the window, and I saw tears flowing over their faces as well. At the same time they must have been glad that they were protected from my infectious disease through the screen, since they made no attempt to enter my room at all cost. Obviously, transparent screens are permeable for emotions and stir desires; indeed the screen even magnifies them. But more than this, screens protect and shield us from all the perils and dangers that the Real has in store for us.

In the age of total simulacra, Baudrillard says “we can no longer move through the mirror to the other side, as we could during the golden age of transcendence.”

(Baudrillard, 1991: 312) The post-modern is an infinite array of shifting, sliding and floating signifiers, and these signifiers not only have lost their connection with the signified, and they also generate a whole network of referents to a past that can no longer be experienced.

Through our technologies, we have become omnipresent, looking at far away planets with unmanned spacecraft, peering into the ocean depths with unmanned submarines, programming remote controlled targeted killings with unmanned aircraft (drones), but in doing so, we are foregoing the whole body experience of place for a sanitized screen version of it. A big challenge will be re-claiming a sense of presence - even if this presence is, at times, painful.

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